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# **Partners for Action:**

## **A Qualitative Report on Homelessness in Burnaby**

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**Prepared for the RCMP by:**

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## Executive Summary

There has been a significant amount of research conducted in recent years to determine the extent of the homelessness crisis in British Columbia's Lower Mainland. Unfortunately, most of this research has been focused on homelessness in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside; thereby, neglecting the crisis that neighbouring municipalities are also experiencing. The City of Burnaby is one of these satellite communities faced with a homelessness problem; but, until 2005, very little had been done about the issue. Consequently, there has been a lack of research conducted on homelessness in Burnaby

In January 2009, the RCMP allowed a practicum student from Simon Fraser University to research homelessness in Burnaby. The research took place over a four month period, from January to April of 2009; and included archival, observational and interview-based methods. The report that follows is the product of that research. It focuses on describing the evolution of homelessness in Burnaby and discussing what the community has done to address the issue.

### Homelessness Explained

The influx of homelessness in Burnaby and neighbouring Lower Mainland municipalities is due, in large part, to the following factors:

1. *A shortage of social housing* caused by the cessation of both federal and provincial housing programs,
2. *Federal and provincial changes to income assistance* that restricted the funding of income assistance programs and made it more difficult for people to get on welfare, and
3. *The deinstitutionalization of persons with mental illnesses.*

These three factors offer macro-level explanations of homelessness, but, there are also a number of individual-level factors that predispose certain people to feeling the effects of these policy changes more so than others:

1. *Family Breakdown*-Failed relationships sometimes leave one partner without a home.
2. *Addictions*-Severe addictions may cause a person to lose family, friends and/or jobs; and may inhibit one's ability to take care of him or her self.
3. *Mental Illness*-Severe mental illnesses preclude an individual from being able to sustain a home and/or employment.
4. *Loss of Employment*-Job loss may force a person to live off of welfare cheques; which are often inadequate to sustain independent living.
5. *Choice*-Some people do, in fact, choose to be homeless because of the lack of responsibility that accompanies this lifestyle; however, the percentage of people choosing to be homeless is very small.

Once a person becomes homeless it is very difficult for them to get off of the streets because *homelessness, joblessness, boredom, crime and addiction* reinforce one another in a homelessness cycle.

## Effects of Homelessness

Homelessness affects not only the homeless, but also the community and society at large. The homeless suffer from *health problems, hunger and damaged self-efficacy*. Communities tend to *fear the homeless* and must cope with *loitering, criminal activity, refuse, and health hazards* like exposed needles and urine bottles. Ultimately, society must cover the cost of homelessness; which includes providing *health care, housing, support and criminal justice services* to the homeless.

## The Story of Change in Burnaby

In 2004, homelessness became more noticeable in Burnaby; which prompted concern from a number of community members in Burnaby's Southeast, Kingsway-Corridor District. Almost immediately, the concerned parties realized that there were no services available to homeless people living in Burnaby. Consequently, the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness was formed in 2005; and, for the past four years, it has led local initiatives to end homelessness in Burnaby. The Task Force, which is made up of community members, service providers and government agencies, has had a number of tremendous accomplishments over a relatively short period of time; some of which include:

- ▲ *A report on homelessness* written by Jim Woodward and Associates in 2005.
- ▲ The hiring of *Outreach Workers* in Burnaby who work under the direction of a local not-for-profit service agency, Progressive Housing Society (PHS).
- ▲ The Establishment of *Outreach Resource Centers* across the city run by PHS
- ▲ The deployment of a *Mobile Outreach Van* operated by PHS.
- ▲ The opening of an *Extreme Weather Shelter*, run by Lookout Emergency Aid Society out of St. Francis De Sales Church in South Burnaby.

Interestingly, the RCMP has played a unique role in addressing Burnaby's homelessness problem. The District Commander for Burnaby's Southeast District chose to employ a problem oriented policing approach to homelessness. Accordingly, the RCMP have been involved in Task Force activities, and have even mobilized members of the faith community to assist with delivering services to Burnaby's homeless.

As a result of efforts made by members of the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness, homeless people in Burnaby are starting to receive the help they need to get off of the streets; however, a number of obstacles stand in the way of the Task Force's ultimate goal of ending homelessness in Burnaby. Accordingly, several recommendations must be followed before permanent solutions to homelessness in Burnaby can be found.

## Recommendations

- #1** *The Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments need to work together and with the community to develop an integrated plan to end homelessness in Burnaby*
- #2** *The City of Burnaby must advocate for their homelessness problem*
- #3** *Burnaby needs an emergency shelter coupled with supportive and affordable housing*
- #4** *Burnaby is in need of a permanent outreach facility*
- #5** *The public must make an effort to break down the barriers that exist between themselves and the homeless*
- #6** *The community needs to lobby for change*
- #7** *Provincially-run and, preferably, community-based support services should be established for people dealing with severe mental illnesses and/or addictions*
- #8** *The Province should provide sufficient outreach services to the homeless*

## Ending Homelessness

We are *all* responsible for bringing about an end to homelessness. Canadians must not tolerate social conditions, like homelessness, that would normally characterize third world countries. Homelessness is a disruption to our communities and an incredible strain on taxpayer dollars. Indeed, Patterson et al. (2008) note that providing the homeless with housing and the supports necessary for people to remain housed would be cheaper than continuing to do what we have been doing. However, the longer we wait to deal with homelessness appropriately the more expensive it will become to fix the problem. Therefore,

society must take swift action against homelessness before it is too late to reverse the effects of this spiralling epidemic. The road to recovery will be long, but with partnership and perseverance homelessness *can* be overcome.

## 1.0 Introduction

With the 2010 Olympic Winter Games fast approaching, homelessness has come to the forefront of public and political attention in British Columbia. Accordingly, a significant amount of research has been conducted to quantify the homelessness problem, and has suggested various programs and policies that may be capable of putting an end to the crisis. Unfortunately, this large body of research has mostly been aimed at tackling homelessness in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside; thereby, neglecting the crisis that neighbouring municipalities are also experiencing. The City of Burnaby is one of these satellite communities faced with a homelessness problem; but, unlike other Lower Mainland municipalities, many of which have been providing services to the homeless for nearly a decade, Burnaby only began to address the issue in 2005 (Woodward & Associates, 2005). Consequently, there has been very little qualitative research done to describe the problem in Burnaby and evaluate the services that are available. Quantitative reports written in 2001 and 2005 identified the number of people dealing with homelessness in Burnaby, and noted gaps in support services (O'Shannacery, 2008). As a result of these studies, programs were created to support Burnaby's homeless population; but, remarkably there has been no formal research carried out since their inception. Thus, this report, which shall discuss the evolution of homelessness in Burnaby, has been written in response to a lack of explanatory and evaluative research available on homelessness and services being provided to the homeless in this City.

## 1.1 Methodology

This research was conducted for the Burnaby RCMP by a 4<sup>th</sup> year Criminology student from Simon Fraser University. The student was enrolled in a full-time practicum term at Burnaby's Southeast District Community Police Office from January-April of 2009. The paper that follows is the result of a combination of archival, observational and interview-based research that took place in Burnaby over that four month period. Participants included service providers, police

officers, politicians, health workers, volunteers and the homeless themselves. For a more detailed methodology please refer to Appendix A of this report.

## 1.2 Defining Homelessness

Homelessness is typically separated into two categories; the absolute homeless and the hidden homeless (Patterson et al, 2008 & Woodward & Associates, 2005). People who are absolutely homeless have no home and no place to sleep other than outside or in an emergency shelter. Similarly, the hidden homeless, “couch surf, moving from place to place (usually with family or friends) but have little or no certainty of where they will sleep from one night to the next” (Woodward & Associates, 2005, p. 5). For the purposes of this report, the definition of homelessness includes both the absolute and hidden homeless populations.

## 2.0 Homelessness in Burnaby

Homelessness in Burnaby went largely unrecognized until 2001 (O’Shannacery, 2008). In 2001 absolute homelessness became more visible as greater numbers of people began sleeping on city streets. This prompted concern from a local mental health agency, Progressive Housing Society (PHS), who then commissioned a report, “Organizing to End Homelessness in Burnaby”, to investigate the extent of the problem (O’Shannacery, 2008). A 2002 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count identified 17 homeless individuals living in Burnaby; but, by 2005 and then, again, in 2008 this number more than doubled to 40 and 86, respectively (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2008<sup>b</sup>; Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008). However, point-in-time homeless counts are almost always undercounts (Woodward & Associates, 2005). Cheryl Stogren, Supervisor of the PHS Homeless Outreach Program, estimates there to be between 200 and 250 people dealing with homelessness in Burnaby. Stogren’s estimate derives from the nearly 200 people/week using the outreach

services that are being offered by PHS in Burnaby. So, how is it that Burnaby developed a homelessness problem?

## 2.1 The Homelessness Problem

The answer to the question above is complicated because a number of factors are responsible for the present-day homelessness crisis.

### 2.1.1 *Shortages of Social Housing*

One major contributor to the homelessness problem has been an erosion of Canada's social safety net. Vancouver MLA, David Chudnovsky explains the disparity:

There is no mystery as to why we have a homelessness crisis...in 1994 the Federal Government stopped building social housing. Up until that time from the 40's to the 90's, there was a national social housing program...then in 2002 the Provincial Government ended the provincial social housing program.

Accordingly, there has been very little affordable housing built in BC since 2002. Couple this lack of social housing with inflated property values and low vacancy rates, and a housing shortage becomes inevitable (Chudnovsky, 2008). Burnaby's Mayor, Derek Corrigan, would agree with Chudnovsky's analysis of the situation:

Social Housing hasn't been built in British Columbia for 25 years because of both federal and provincial decisions...[and] as a result of [these] decisions [we've fallen] far behind in the provision of social housing.

-Mayor Derek Corrigan

Thus, many people who require social housing are unable to secure adequate accommodation; and those that do still face a heightened risk of losing their homes because the homelessness crisis has not been caused solely by gaps in housing.

### 2.1.2 *Changes to Income Assistance*

The Citywide Housing Coalition (n.d.) explains that in 1996 the federal government ended the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP); which allowed provinces to deny welfare and reduce benefits to those in need. From 1966-1996, when the CAP was in effect, the federal government paid for a percentage of provincial social welfare costs. But, in 1996 the CAP was replaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer program; which provided lump sum payments to the provinces that were supposed to cover health, post-secondary *and* welfare costs (Online Dictionary of the Social Sciences, 2002). Sadly, this resulted in provincial cuts to income assistance programs because the pre-determined transfer payments imposed financial restrictions on the services that could be offered.

In 2002 the problem was compounded in British Columbia when the provincial government introduced new rules that were aimed at “ending the culture of welfare dependency” (‘Welfare to work’ didn’t work, 2007). These rules made it much more difficult for people to access and remain on welfare (Klein & Puckingham, 2008). Although the measures were aimed at encouraging people to find employment, the initiative did not have its intended effect. The number of unemployed homeless living in BC has gone up steadily since 2002; and those who are without a home struggle just to meet their basic daily needs (Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008).

It’s hard to keep a job when you don’t have a place to stay...I could get off the street right now if I had a month and half’s rent...[but] getting on the system is tough.

-Steve

### 2.1.3 *Deinstitutionalization*

A third major contributor to today’s homelessness problem was the deinstitutionalization of persons suffering from mental illnesses in the late 1980’s (Chudnovsky, 2008). The 2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count revealed that

33% of people without a home bear some form of mental illness (Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008). However, this researcher thinks that number is likely an underestimate because of the prevalence of undiagnosed mental disorders that exist within the homeless population. David Chudnovsky explains how mentally ill persons have ended up without homes:

When they closed down Riverview etc. in the late 80's the promise was that there was going to be support and residences for those people, and the promise was never kept.

Mayor Corrigan further describes the effects of deinstitutionalization:

While it may be laudable to want to have people outside an institution, there were many reasons that institutions came into being...all of those people were essentially let out of Riverview and put into situations where they simply went on to the welfare system; which is inadequate for people who have all their capabilities, never mind people who have severe mental illness...[releasing] people from institutions was much more expensive [than housing] those people within the community...You would have to provide group homes and neighbourhoods that [were] highly staffed [because] families weren't prepared to have these individuals become dependent on them.

This claim is substantiated by Bill's story. Bill is a schizophrenic who has been living on the streets for a number of years because "being around [his] family is very difficult;" and he is unable to work due to his mental illness. Bill noted that his family wants him to take his medication otherwise they "scuffle"; but he has not used medication for nearly two years:

[Medication] really debilitates me...does stuff to me that's not me. I can't notice what kind of animal I am, like a human animal. When I'm not taking them I can see as normal people do.

-Bill

Bill's situation is common within the homeless population. Mentally ill individuals often choose not to take prescribed medications because of their negative side effects. Consequently, their social ties deteriorate and they are left with few resources other than government welfare cheques. Ultimately, a mentally ill person living in the community without adequate community-based support is prone to becoming homeless (Chudnovsky, 2008).

A combination of changes in social housing, income assistance and the deinstitutionalisation of persons suffering from mental illnesses have brought us to the crisis we are faced with today. These antecedents provide macro-level explanations of homelessness; however, they do not offer an individual-level account of why people become homeless.

## 2.2 The Road to Homelessness

Contrary to public perception, the homeless community is diverse in nature (Patterson, Somers, McIntosh, Shiell & Frankish, 2008). People become homeless for a number of reasons, some of which include: relationship breakdown, addiction issues, health problems, loss of employment, mental illness and/or an inability to find affordable housing (Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008). Indeed, some people even choose to be homeless so as to segregate themselves from a society they do not wish to be a part of. Thus, the homeless community is made up of people from all walks of life; and the only thing homeless individuals have in common with one another is that a host of factors have combined to leave left them all without a home.

### 2.2.1 *Family Breakdown*

Family breakdown was one of the most frequently cited reasons for homelessness found in this study. Family is the last line of defence for most people in society because family members are usually considered to be an unwavering

pillar of support; but, what happens when this pillar collapses? The answer is often homelessness. Robert was found sleeping in a Burnaby park because his “lady” kicked him out after having lived together for only four months. Similarly, Steve has been homeless for nearly two years after an argument with his wife resulted in a restraining order being issued against him.

Me and my spouse got in an argument...I'm not right, she's not right...but the way it is dealt with currently is you fight with your spouse and somebody complains...police show up...and charge me for assault...then they say I can't go home until it's dealt with.

-Steve

What Steve is referring to is the fact that a no contact order is normally issued in domestic violence cases until the trial has concluded. If both parties lived in the home before the dispute then the spouse who has the order issued against them cannot return home, sometimes for years. Many people, especially those without family relations in their city of residence, are subsequently left with nowhere to go. The problem is further compounded by the fact that even if both parties want to work out their issues they are unable to do so until after the case is heard in court. Steve noted, “We can't even go to couples counselling because of the rules”. Thus, people who end up on the streets of Burnaby as a result of family breakdown often remain homeless for extended periods of time; although, this is likely due, in part, to Burnaby's gap in support services, which will be discussed later on in this report. Family breakdown is a significant contributor to homelessness; but, of course, it has its own root causes that also predispose a person to becoming homeless.

### *2.2.2 Addictions*

Addictions have a huge role to play in family breakdown and life on the streets. 18% of homeless people surveyed in Vancouver believe that their addictions are partly or wholly responsible for them being homeless (Greater

Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008). Even more astounding is Burnaby's 2005 Homeless Count, which revealed that 50% of homeless individuals living in this city cite addiction as a cause of their condition (Woodward & Associates, 2005). It is believed that between 40 and 60 percent of homeless people have addiction issues (Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008). However, it is unclear where this number divides between those who are homeless because of their addictions and those who develop addictions from being homeless. Ted is one example of someone who ended up on the streets because of a severe addiction.

Ted's marriage broke down because he was an alcoholic, and he eventually lost his job for the same reason. Ted lived on the streets for years, but has been housed since 2006. He is still an alcoholic and lives off of welfare cheques because "not many places will hire you if they find out you're an alcoholic", and they usually find out when a person shows up to work with the odour of liquor on their breath. Ted says he can quit drinking, but doesn't want to; and, so, he lives with his addiction maintaining that, "Some people wake up and need to have a coffee; others need to have a beer".

Jason is another victim of addiction. Jason was homeless for nearly two years because he, too, is an alcoholic. Jason has grown kids that he's not seen for a very long time; which is very upsetting to him, but he is still unable to stop drinking. During his time on the streets Jason's life revolved around his addiction. Like so many others with severe addictions, Jason would sift through garbage bins for bottles and panhandle just to make enough money to feed his addiction. Now, Jason lives in a home with welfare as his primary source of income, but he is still an alcoholic and has not gotten back the life his addiction took from him.

Stories of addiction can be found everywhere in the homeless population. Addictions sometimes lead to family breakdown, and other times to self-destruction because, as Steve explains, "For an addict the first priority, and the only priority until it's met, is the [addiction]". Thus, addiction is a major

contributor to becoming homeless, and stands as an obstacle to getting people off the streets.

### 2.2.3 *Mental Illness*

Another contributing factor to becoming homeless is mental illness. As previously mentioned, people with severe mental illnesses that are living in the community do not usually receive adequate support from families and/or the government for their condition. Homelessness is a common product of this equation; likely, because severe mental illness precludes an individual from being able to sustain a home and/or employment. People with mental illnesses are, then, forced to live off of government assistance cheques that are designed to meet basic need requirements, but are often inadequate at doing so (Patterson et al., 2008). Accordingly, a rather large segment of the homeless population is plagued not only by poverty, but also by mental illnesses that are going untreated.

### 2.2.4 *Loss of Employment*

One of the more obvious reasons for homelessness is loss of employment. Employment can be lost for any number of reasons including: personal injury, addiction, mental illness and company layoffs/termination. In fact, many people are unaware of just how close they are to becoming homeless.

Most people that I know that are doing well are two paycheques away from being homeless...90% of people that come into this [restaurant], you ask them if they can take both paycheques, next paycheque and the paycheque after that and...give it all away, and they couldn't...they might be able to give away one, but by the time the second one comes they're living off of that.

-Steve

Robert, who was on the streets temporarily because of a relationship breakdown, injured himself while trying to gain access to his outdoor encampment. He had found housing for the next week, but was worried that he

wouldn't be able to remain housed. Unfortunately, Robert had to spend much longer on the streets than he had originally intended because he could not work due to his injury, and was ineligible for income assistance until after the mandatory three-week waiting period had expired. Certainly, being unable to work and receive a steady income prolongs an individual's time on the street. However, not having a home, itself, promotes joblessness because, as Robert explains, "It's hard to [work] when you don't have anywhere to live".

Homelessness causes erratic sleeping patterns that stem from constantly being on guard to protect oneself from environmental elements, and from other people, both homeless and not, looking to steal their belongings and/or assault them. As a result, homeless individuals do not get very much sleep and suffer from chronic fatigue that inhibits their ability to work. Moreover, the homeless have limited access to hygiene services; which makes it difficult for them to present themselves to both current and potential employers. Steve notes that, "Even the shelters, they don't help you get to work in the morning." Hence, homelessness and joblessness go hand-in-hand, with each fuelling the other.

### *2.2.5 Choosing Homelessness*

The final path to homelessness is said to be one of choice. The Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (2008) reported that approximately 4% of homeless people do not want a home. This is often a result of becoming street entrenched. Dave Brown, a Community Services Manager with Lookout Emergency Aid Society, explains this phenomenon:

If somebody has been on the streets for a few years it takes a while to get that person to a place where they're ready to move forward again [because] after you're on the street for about 6 months you change...it becomes all about survival...[in fact] taking them off the streets may kill them.

Becoming street entrenched can happen relatively quickly; but, the condition can persist for many years; which causes people like Gerald, a 74 year old man who has been without a home for nearly 50 years, to lose hope for a better life.

Certainly, many people who do not want to be housed are street entrenched, but there are some individuals who do, in fact, enjoy being homeless because of the lack of responsibility that accompanies the lifestyle. Jason reminisced about his time on the streets and recalled how good it felt to have no responsibilities. He noted that he, “Just need[ed] to make \$10-\$15 to buy drugs and booze”, and that was it. Steve, however, believes that nobody truly wants to be homeless; insisting that,

The people that don't want the help, 90% of those people are confused and scared and should be somewhere along in the mental health [system].

While there are some benefits to homelessness, these advantages tend to be overshadowed by the harsh reality of life on the streets; a life that involves digging through dumpsters, sleeping on beds of newspaper and living in constant fear of being victimized. Indeed, Jason did not return to the streets once he got off. Thus, those people who claim that they do not want a home likely feel a sense of hopelessness rather than happiness.

### 2.3 Staying on the Streets:

According to the *Woodward Report* and the *2008 Metro Vancouver Homeless Count* a large number of homeless people agree that lack of income and housing costs are largely responsible for them continuing to be homeless (Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008; Woodward & Associates, 2005). Robert highlighted these challenges saying,

You tell me a place around here, other than a little dive cockroach infested hotel that you can find for \$375.

The reality is that there is no alternative. Steve explains,

Two people have to live together out here, no matter what way you look at it.

The \$375 a month given to people on social assistance for rent is insufficient for independent living in today's rental market, especially since the average rent for a bachelor apartment in Burnaby falls between \$587 and \$659 per month (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2008). As a result, people who are homeless often spend the full amount of their rental allowance on food, hotels, and feeding their addictions because the money cannot be used to secure housing. Therefore, the welfare system in its current state seems only to perpetuate the cycle of homelessness.

### *2.3.1 The Homelessness Cycle*

A relationship seems to exist between homelessness, joblessness, boredom, addiction and crime. These five factors combine to create a cycle of homelessness that cannot be broken without the help of others. Unfortunately, almost all people who become homeless begin the homelessness cycle within days of their entry onto the street. First, a person becomes homeless for any number of reasons, including those listed in the previous section (family breakdown, addiction issues, mental illness, job loss etc.). As a result of being homeless an individual is likely to lose their job (if they hadn't already) because of fatigue and cleanliness issues. When a person is jobless they have a great deal of time on their hands; which causes many people living on the street to experience extreme boredom. Being homeless is not a pleasant life and, often, homeless individuals search for ways to fill their time and escape their surroundings. Because work is hard to come by for the homeless they almost invariably resort to using drugs/alcohol. Daryl, who has been homeless for 11 years, notes that he refuses to quit drinking because of the "boredom of being straight". For those who are homeless as a result of their

addictions, their problems become more pronounced on the streets since drugs are easy to acquire in Metro Vancouver, and offer a quick fix for tedium, depression and anxiety. Steve remarked,

If you can't find dope in five minutes out here, you're not a drug user...It's everywhere...It's just a natural part of life [in BC]...It's looked upon as acceptable [because] it's a port city.

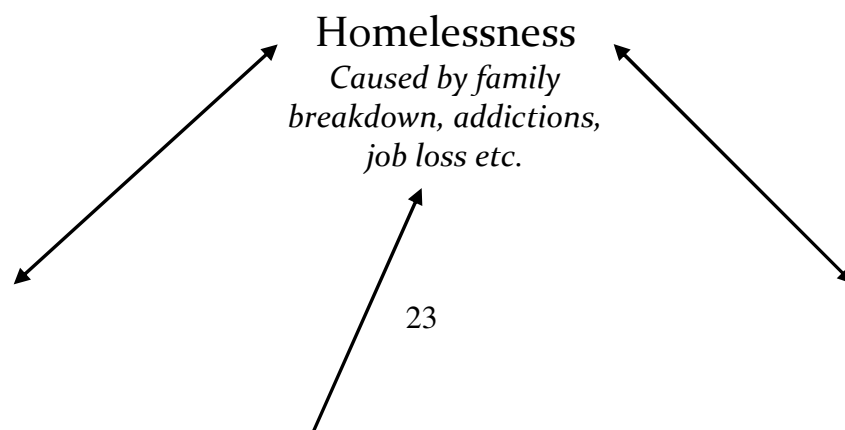
Once a person starts using drugs they can become addicted very quickly, especially if they use any of the hard drugs that permeate the streets.

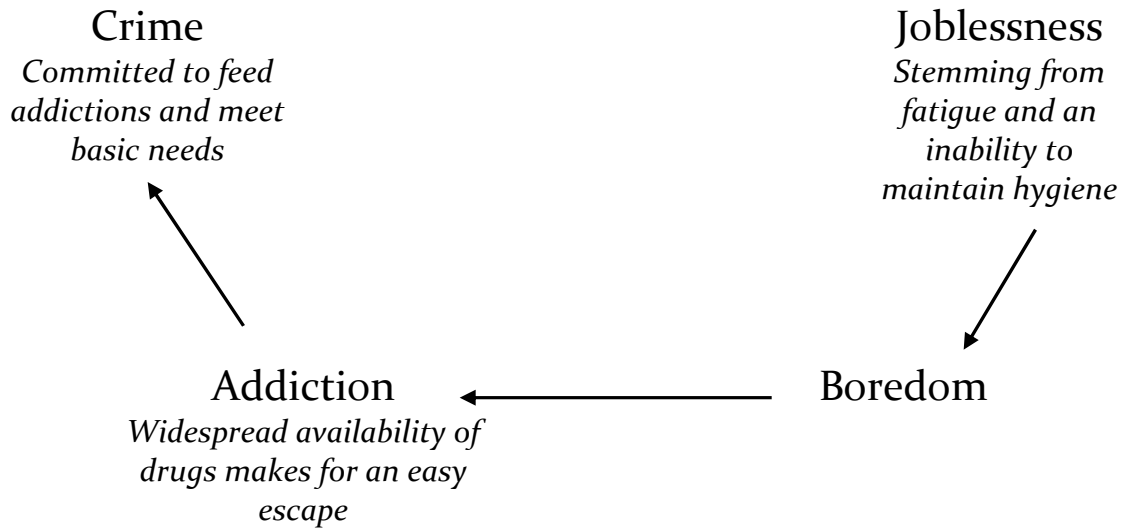
A heroin addict is a heroin addict for life...it's the best thing there is in life, now try and erase that from your brain...and if you try to quit you're going to pay hell.

-Steve

Drug addicts will do whatever it takes to fuel their drug habit, including committing crimes like robbery and theft. Crime is a common way for the homeless to supplement the minimal income they receive from social assistance. Daryl suggested that, "A lot of homeless [people] resort to crime to take care of needs". For an addict, drugs are their number one need at all times; so it is no surprise that 80% of property crime in British Columbia is drug related (Basham, 2001). By the time homeless individuals start committing crimes to support themselves they have come full circle and embody the entire gambit of precipitating factors related to homelessness. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the homelessness cycle.

*Figure 1: The Homelessness Cycle*





## 3.0 Effects of Homelessness

Homelessness has far-reaching consequences that are felt by almost every segment of society. The homeless must endure the hardships associated with life on the street, communities have to cope with homelessness in their neighbourhoods and, ultimately, society has to foot the bill for this expensive social condition.

### 3.1 Effects on the Homeless

Homelessness is a constant struggle for those who have to live with the condition. As a result of living outdoors, the homeless suffer from health problems, hunger and damaged self-efficacy.

#### 3.1.1 Health Problems

Homeless people suffer from a number of physical ailments that stem from being unsheltered. Clean socks and sturdy shoes are hard to come by for the homeless; hence, many individuals wear the same pair of socks and damaged shoes for days or even weeks. When the weather turns wet, which is not uncommon in

BC's Lower Mainland, people living on the streets can develop a condition known as street feet. Street foot is similar to athlete's foot and causes the skin to be ripped away from the foot. The condition is painful and increases a person's risk for infection.

The homeless also face cold and/or wet weather that makes them vulnerable to contracting flu, colds, and other health problems. Patterson et al. (2008, p. 24) note that substantially more homeless people report themselves as being in "fair" or "poor" health when compared to the general population. A Vancouver study showed that 36% of homeless people rated themselves as being in "fair" or "poor" health; whereas only 10% of the general population reported the same (Patterson et al., 2008, p. 24).

Often, when homeless people contract an illness it goes untreated for extended periods of time because the homeless have difficulty accessing medical services. Even when they do receive medical attention, homeless individuals are discharged shortly after being given treatment; which is problematic because, as Cheryl Stogren from PHS explains,

People get kicked out of hospitals...aren't recovered, and get sicker on the street.

Consequently, once a homeless person becomes ill, being homeless tends to exacerbate their illness.

### 3.1.2 *Hunger*

Most homeless people experience chronic hunger that originates from sporadic eating and inadequate meal portions. Some individuals search through garbage bins and dumpsters for their next meal and others pan handle or commit crimes to meet their basic needs. However, given the significant proportion of the homeless population that are addicted to drugs, food is almost always second to obtaining a "fix". The *Burnaby Newsleader* profiled Joe, a homeless person, who

contends that, “at least 99 per cent of panhandlers are using it for drugs” (McQuillan, 2009). Whether or not money goes to food or to drugs, the homeless live in a state of constant hunger and malnourishment that makes living on the streets that much more difficult.

### 3.1.3 *Damages to Self-Esteem*

Finally, homeless people are faced with being the subject of numerous stereotypes that are emotionally damaging. The homeless are commonly referred to as “bums”; and are believed to be lazy and unworthy of attention. These unfounded stereotypes only serve to alienate an already disadvantaged population. Ted commented on a general air of disrespect directed towards the homeless. According to Ted, homeless people try to interact with other citizens all the time, but when the homeless say “hi” people do not usually reciprocate. The consequence of their alienation is that most homeless people do not like asking for help.

I don't like asking people for help, like that's a tough thing to do...you feel bad enough that you have to ask, but then when you do, they belittle you...people shut you down [and] you just get sick of it.

-Steve

Accordingly, Ted believes that if people showed more respect towards the homeless they might be more inclined to ask for help.

James, who has been without a home for several years, reminds us that the homeless are “people too”; and, as Steve explains, they are “only different because they look grubby and dirty”. Unfortunately, though, laypersons tend to focus on the aesthetic and social differences that exist between the homeless and themselves rather than the fundamental similarities.

## 3.2 Effects on the Community

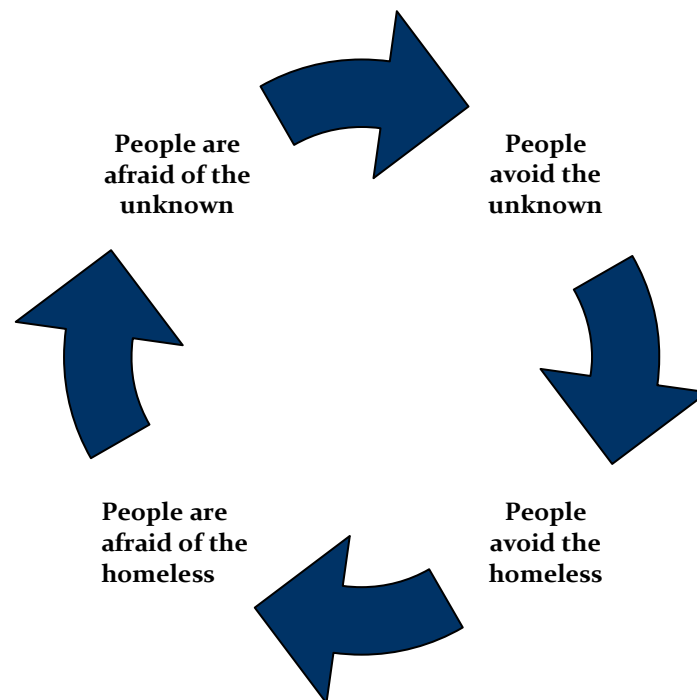
David Chudnovsky (2008) states that,

Homelessness is a disruption to our communities...there's people who are on the street and are involved sometimes in behaviours that are illegal.

Most would agree that the mere presence of homelessness in a neighbourhood detracts from the quality of life in that area. People sleeping in front of businesses often deter customers from visiting the establishment. Street activities such as drug dealing and the public consumption of alcohol cause many community members to fear for their safety. Despite this fear of victimization being largely disproportionate to the actual risk, people who live in areas that are frequented by the homeless try to avoid coming into contact with them.

Dave Brown from Lookout Emergency Aid Society explains that, "People are afraid of the unknown". It should come as no surprise that most people don't know the homeless members of their community because, as S/Sgt. John Buis of the Burnaby RCMP puts it, "They're the kinds of people, people stay away from". Consequently, a feedback loop is formed with people's fear of the homeless being reinforced by their unwillingness to approach them.

*Figure 2. Fear of the Homeless Positive Feedback Loop*



The community must also deal with the consequences of drug use on their streets. With many drug habits requiring intravenous injection, neighbourhoods are often littered with used needles. Exposed needles can be found in parks, along pathways and under bridges; and pose a serious threat to the safety of unsuspecting community members, especially children. The health risk is so great that the City of Burnaby has had to hire a team of maintenance workers to clean up homeless encampments throughout the city on a weekly basis. Clearly, one can see that addictions not only have an impact on the lives of the homeless, but also on the lives of those who live in the communities in which the drug-addicted homeless frequent.

### 3.3 Effects on Society

Homelessness is an incredible strain on taxpayer dollars. Social revenue must cover the expenses associated with providing health care, housing, support and criminal justice services to the homeless. Presently, this is costing British Columbians a staggering \$694.9 million per year (Patterson et al., 2008).

### 3.3.1 *Health Care Costs*

Patterson et al. (2008) estimate that health care costs in British Columbia alone total \$624,641,353 per year for the absolute homeless population. Homeless people with severe mental illness and/or addictions use disproportionately more emergency and crisis services than those who are housed; which is probably a direct result of poor physical health that accompanies life on the streets (Patterson et al., 2008). A large body of research has demonstrated that homelessness is associated with increased morbidity, mortality and victimization; all of which are draining on the health care system (Patterson et al., 2008). Incredibly, homeless individuals use an estimated \$53,161 per year, per person, in provincial health care services (Patterson et al., 2008). On average, the homeless spend 58.45 days per year in hospital care; although, as previously mentioned, the time spent in hospitals is often insufficient for them to fully recover from their illness (Patterson et al., 2008).

### 3.3.2 *Costs of Housing & Services*

Currently, providing housing and residential services for the homeless costs British Columbians \$50,617,563 per annum (Patterson et al., 2008). Federal, provincial and municipal governments assist with the funding of shelters, transitional housing and outreach services that are aimed at getting the homeless off the streets; however, the money spent has been insufficient to satisfy the demand for housing. Cheryl Stogren noted that PHS finds housing for about 5-10 people per month; however, she went on to say that they also meet 1 or 2 new people every week. Thus, the services being provided are, at best, only slowing the growth of the homeless population; which is confirmed by the fact that the numbers of people dealing with homelessness have gone up steadily since 2002 (Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008).

### 3.3.3 *Costs to the Criminal Justice System*

Finally, homelessness takes a hefty toll on the criminal justice system. This springs from the fact that homeless people will often commit crimes to support themselves on the streets. Ray Allen, Chairman of Burnaby's Southeast District Community Policing Advisory Committee (CPAC), explains:

They have no skills. They've got no home. How are they going to live? They're probably going to pinch things.

Robert believes that, "a lot of [homeless] people will do whatever it takes to make a buck" because they have addictions that must be satisfied no matter what the cost. Similarly, Steve asserts that upholding the law is nearly impossible for the homeless to do:

If you don't break the law you're going to be awful hungry...I've probably broken every law ever made...[but] it was always, in retrospect, needing enough money to survive...I knew a guy who would steal a car and drive it until it ran out of gas then steal another one just to stay warm.

Patterson et al. (2008) determined that the homeless cost correctional institutions in BC alone an estimated \$19,645,837 per year. This figure is only a fraction of the actual costs of homelessness to the criminal justice system because, in addition to correctional services, the homeless utilize police and court resources whenever they are involved in a crime. Even when no crime has been committed, Mayor Corrigan explains that homelessness is a constant strain on police resources:

We're paying 80 grand a year plus benefits to an RCMP officer to deal with [the homeless]...we keep funding police and adding to our police forces, despite crime going down...because we're dealing with problems that aren't necessarily criminal problems. So, our police officers end up picking up all the social problems that are out on our

streets...In many cases [police] attention is diverted from serious crime and investigating cases that are important to dealing with someone who is a nuisance on the streets, and it takes just as long to arrest and fill out reports for someone who's a nuisance as it does for someone who's a criminal.

Based on this researcher's experience, the police respond to at least 2-3 calls a day where the subject of the complaint is a homeless individual. Calls for service usually involve homeless people squatting in places where they are unwanted, illicit drug use in public, minor assaults, shoplifting and robberies without weapons where small amounts of money (<\$100) are taken. These minor criminal and nuisance activities inundate police call queues; which prevents officers from being able to investigate more serious criminal offences.

[People] are surprised when our officers don't have the time to go out and deal with gangs and other things... [Well it's] because they're busy out on the street dealing with [nuisances]...it really does reprioritize all of our officers' work.

-Mayor Derek Corrigan

The police are often ill-equipped to deal with the homeless when they do come into contact with them. Most homeless individuals have not committed a crime when the police are called out to deal with them (police are repeatedly called to move homeless people from one area to another; therefore, the police have limited options available to them in the course of their duties. They can either inform people of the law or enforce it; but aside from their ability to exercise judicial intervention, the police have no more or less power than any other member of society. Thus, when the police encounter a homeless person there is not much that they can do if that individual has not committed a criminal act because being homeless is not a crime. Typically, these people need help that the police cannot provide.

Every time there isn't the right support out there, police officers are consistently put in positions where they have

not been trained. They don't have the expertise. It's like using a sledge hammer to swat a fly.

-Mayor Derek Corrigan

S/Sgt. Buis explains that, "We haven't given officers the tools they need to help the homeless". The homeless need social workers who can help them overcome their addictions, secure gainful employment and find affordable housing. These are all services that the police are neither trained nor mandated to provide; which is why homelessness is such a strain on police resources.

Clearly, the problem of homelessness has far-reaching effects that are costly to us all. Unfortunately, no level of government has adequately funded initiatives that could put an end to homelessness in Burnaby; and the police are unable to solve the problem on their own because homelessness is not simply a police matter. The question, then, is what can be done about this issue? It seems that, more often than not, communities have had to find their own solutions to homelessness; and Burnaby has been no exception (British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, 2000). The story of what has happened in Burnaby over the past four years is a powerful example of how the community can work in partnership with other agencies, including the police, to bring about change to homelessness in a city.

## 4.0 The Burnaby Story

Prior to 2005, Burnaby had very few resources available to assist homeless people living in their municipality. The majority of services were provided by the Salvation Army and other local churches; however, meals and clothing donations formed the extent of services offered.

During the week, for Burnaby residents who were homeless the only meals that were available was the soup truck Monday nights run by the Salvation Army, and Tuesday at West Burnaby United Church.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

Major Elizabeth Grad, of the Salvation Army, notes that there was no outreach work being done in Burnaby aside from the Salvation Army sending people to shelters in other municipalities. Burnaby had no homeless shelter, no drop-in centre, no outreach workers and no health services for the homeless. And, although a 2002 homeless count revealed that there were homeless people living in Burnaby, the numbers were not high enough to warrant the creation of permanent outreach services (Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness, 2008). However, by 2004 the problem became more pronounced.

In 2004, a concentration of homeless people and illicit activities began to pool in Burnaby's Southeast, Kingsway-Corridor District. S/Sgt. John Buis, who had just been appointed as the District Commander for the Edmonds area, describes what he saw upon his arrival:

When I first got here in 2004 I couldn't believe my eyes...sex trade workers openly applying their trade on the streets, drug trafficking going on in the open and a considerable number of homeless people.

Up until 2004, the homelessness and drug activity that existed in Burnaby was mainly hidden from public view, but in the summer of that year the city tore down a number of uninhabitable buildings along the Kingsway-corridor that homeless people were living in; and soon after the neighbourhood became inundated with illegal activity and homeless people. Edmonds area resident, Wanda Mulholland was one of the first people to notice this influx:

This neighbourhood had, for over 12 years, coped with a prostitution problem and all the related issues of crime, drugs and safety concerns. A recent demolishing of a neighbourhood hotel and numerous unsafe buildings resulted in a rapid increase in street people visible in the neighbourhood...My own children were unable to walk to school without passing the sex trade worker who my husband and I had just removed from our property. Many people were using drugs at the entry of our townhouse complex, vomiting, stealing, using offensive language,

sitting en masse on the curbs in the area waiting for the drugs dealers to drop off their fix...I was furious with this, and called the local police office and asked to speak with whoever was in charge of the district.

When Mulholland called the Southeast District Community Police Office she spoke with S/Sgt. Buis. Buis listened to Mulholland's concerns, and agreed that there was a problem; however, he didn't know what services he could offer to improve the situation. Mulholland remarks,

[S/Sgt. Buis'] response was, find me something to do with these people, find me services for [them].

Mulholland did some research and realized that there was nothing set up in Burnaby to help the homeless people get off the streets. Moreover, the homeless people and prostitutes living in the Edmonds area could not simply be moved because there was nowhere to send them. Kicking them out of the district would have only pushed the problem onto neighbouring communities that were already dealing with homelessness of their own.

Soon after, S/Sgt. Buis attended a local school to investigate a report of two homeless people suspected of sleeping in the bushes alongside the school field. While there, he ran into Mulholland and they started to talk about what could be done about the homeless situation in the District. Buis and Mulholland both agreed that it was necessary to gather local social service agencies and discuss the issue.

Long story short, we talked to the point of getting a group together who might be able to help us with the homeless problem, and that was the starting point of the Task Force, that occurred in early October [of 2004].

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

## 4.1 The First Meeting

The first gathering of concerned citizens and local service agencies took place on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2004 at the District 3 Community Police Office; and, aside from Buis and Mulholland, attendees included the following: Lynn Wood, the Executive Director, at the time, of Progressive Housing Society; Dave Brown from Lookout Emergency Aid Society; Sheila Liddle, a private citizen; Gurmeet Kubicek from the Ministry of Children and Families; and Rhoda Kallis, a New West Senior Activist.

[S/Sgt. Buis] offered his board room...and helped facilitate the meeting...it was the first time that all of those people had gotten together to talk about this.

-Wanda Mulholland, Task Force Member

This initial meeting was chaired by S/Sgt. Buis; he encouraged those in attendance to explore the homelessness issue and come up with ways they could work together to address it. It was agreed upon at the meeting that homeless people living in the Edmonds area were largely responsible for the deterioration of the community. The involved parties determined that the necessary first step towards finding a solution to homelessness in the area was to present their concerns to the City of Burnaby. On October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004, the delegation met with Burnaby's Municipal Housing Committee to discuss the need for outreach workers, a cold/wet weather shelter and a permanent minimal barrier shelter (O'Shannacery, 2008).

In 2004, very little research had been conducted on homelessness in Burnaby; and because the issue had just started to become more visible it was determined that more information had to be gathered to better quantify the problem. The City agreed to write the Fraser Health Authority and ask them to fund an outreach worker who would conduct research and provide assistance to the homeless. If Fraser Health approved funding for the Outreach Worker, it was expected that the successful candidate would work under the authority of PHS.

PHS is a not-for-profit agency that was started 30 years ago by two health professionals as a resource for people with mental illnesses. This organization had a long history of helping homeless people; however, they typically focused on people who were homeless *and* living with a mental illness. By 2004, PHS Executive Director, Lynn Wood had noticed that there were a substantial number of homeless people in Burnaby who did not suffer from mental illnesses; and, therefore, could not be helped by PHS. It was at this time, Wood received a call from Mulholland inviting her to the meeting at S/Sgt. Buis' office. This was perfect timing for Wood because she was already looking for ways that PHS could help homeless people who did not have mental illnesses; and now she had a group of like-minded people to support her. Consequently, Wood submitted a proposal to the PHS Board of Directors to expand the organization's mandate to include providing outreach services to *all* homeless people living in Burnaby. Like the City, the Board of Directors wanted to have research conducted to determine the extent of the homelessness issue.

I believe in 2005 our executive director at the time, Lynn Wood...put a proposal together for Fraser Health to fund a 6-month research project to see just how homelessness was impacting Burnaby.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

Accordingly, when Fraser Health approved the City of Burnaby's request for an outreach worker/researcher in the spring of 2005, PHS hired Jennifer Brubacher on a 6-month contract. Her research would end up playing a decisive role in the future of homelessness in Burnaby.

## 4.2 Formation of the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness

As a result of the presentation to the Housing Committee and increases in the visibility of homelessness, the City of Burnaby recommended that a Task Force

on Homelessness be formed. Dr. Nadine Loewen, Burnaby's Medical Health Officer, was charged with setting up the Task Force; and in January 2005, when it was officially enacted, the Task Force included representation from the municipal government, Fraser Health Authority, Progressive Housing Society, Lookout Emergency Aid Society, RCMP, Salvation Army, and private citizenry. Mulholland explains that establishing the Task Force was an important first step towards addressing homelessness:

The differing perspectives of the people that sit at the table are really important [because homelessness involves many people]...it isn't just a health concern or a police issue.

However, as former Task Force Co-Chair Major Elizabeth Grad explains, after encouraging its creation, the City of Burnaby withdrew membership from the Task Force until more information could be presented that would detail the homelessness problem. Despite the absence of municipal support, the Task Force took on its first objective in March of 2005 when members organized a point-in-time Homeless Count that was included in a 2005 report entitled *On Our Streets and in Our Shelters*, published by the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (O'Shannacery, 2008; Social Planning and Research Council of BC, 2005). The Task Force recruited volunteers from the community to assist with the count, and secured the involvement of local businesses such as Tim Hortons who provided enumerators with coffee and snacks during the 24-hour count that took place on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2005 (Brubacher, 2005). Forty homeless people were enumerated in Burnaby on that day; which marked the start of Jennifer Brubacher's 6-month research project.

### 4.3 The 2005 Woodward Report

Over the 6-month period that Jennifer Brubacher was employed by PHS she interviewed 61 homeless individuals in Burnaby (Woodward & Associates, 2005).

Jennifer identified a growing homelessness problem in the city that could not be solved by one person alone. She explained that providing outreach services to the homeless was an incredibly demanding task because they required intensive support. In fact, Jennifer would often spend half her day just trying to locate the homeless individuals she agreed to help because many would miss their appointments (Woodward & Associates, 2005). Jennifer's findings were included in a 2005 report on homelessness that was prepared for PHS by Jim Woodward & Associates through funding from Fraser Health Authority. The report was released in September of 2005 and recommended, among other things, that more Outreach Workers be hired in Burnaby, a minimum barrier adult emergency shelter be built in the city, a drop-in centre be opened, and that the City become more involved in addressing the homelessness issue (Woodward & Associates, 2005). As a result of this report, the City of Burnaby rejoined the Task Force as an observer.

#### 4.4 Task Force Objectives

The Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness spent most of 2005 and part of 2006 structuring its membership and objectives. Goals were based on the gaps identified by the Woodward Report and the experiences of both Jennifer Brubacher and Patricia Pedersen, who replaced Brubacher as Burnaby's lone Outreach Worker in October of 2005. The Task Force was divided into five subcommittees, each of which took on their own major priorities (Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness, 2008):

1. *Community awareness and provision of services subcommittee*

Goals included: attract positive media coverage, increase public awareness of homelessness in Burnaby, continue operation of outreach work in Burnaby, increase communication with the RCMP, identify and connect with support services in Burnaby, identify gaps in service and establish a permanent outreach resource centre in Burnaby.

2. *Extreme weather shelter subcommittee*

Goals included: finding and securing a location that could be used as an extreme weather shelter.

3. *Developing housing solutions to homelessness subcommittee*

Goals Included: encourage development of transitional and supportive housing, gain support from City Council and advocate for retention of existing rental housing stock.

4. *Developing partnerships subcommittee*

Goals included: develop relationships with key business leaders in Burnaby, ensure participation of faith groups in housing and homelessness issues, and develop relationships with activist groups working on housing/homelessness issues.

5. *Improve income for people dealing with homelessness or at risk of being homeless subcommittee*

Goals included: advocate for increased financial support from Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance, lobby local businesses to hire people who are dealing with homelessness and recommend that the government subsidize employers who hire the homeless.

## 4.5 Retaining Outreach

Around the same time that the Woodward Report was released, funding for Progressive's only Outreach Worker was set to expire. In light of Brubacher's findings and the Woodward Report, which showed a near quadrupling of Burnaby's homeless population since 2002, PHS approached Fraser Health and asked them to extend the outreach contract (Woodward & Associates, 2005). Fraser Health obliged the request and provided funding to PHS for another six months of outreach work (McQuillan, 2005). Patricia Pederson was subsequently hired on contract until June 9, 2006. Cheryl Stogren, who, in 2006, began

supervising the PHS Homeless Outreach Program, explains the challenge that Patricia faced:

It was one person with no resources, and anybody who she met she worked with. There was no structure around the program and she reported to our ED (Executive Director).

Nevertheless, by May of 2006, Pederson had served 160 clients, all of who were either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless (Hilborn, 2006). Pederson noted that,

Burnaby could probably use the services of three or four Outreach Workers around the city plus a resource centre where people could get a daily meal, showers, use of a computer and referrals to other agencies.

-Taken from Hilborn (2006, para. 9)

Unfortunately, Burnaby was at risk of experiencing quite the opposite as funding for Progressive's Outreach Worker was slated to run out in June and would not be renewed by the Health Authority (Hilborn, 2006). This left PHS scrambling to find an alternate source of funding; otherwise they, themselves, would have to fund the \$80,000/year Outreach Worker position (less than \$50,000 of which was the worker's salary); which, certainly, would have been an unsustainable venture for a small not-for-profit agency, like PHS, to take on. Burnaby was, thus, on the brink of losing its' only homeless Outreach Worker.

In the latter part of May, 2006 PHS received the good news that BC Housing would continue funding Burnaby's Homeless Outreach Program. In addition to extending the Outreach contract to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007, BC Housing set aside funding for a multi-use facility in Burnaby that could include an emergency shelter, supported housing, and a range of services that would make job opportunities available for the homeless (O'Shannacery, 2008). The only stipulation was that a shelter had to be supported by the City of Burnaby. In October of 2006, City Council sent a letter of support to BC Housing and authorized staff to work with

the Task Force to review suitability of potential sites for transitional housing (O'Shannacery, 2008). This was a positive step towards establishing a permanent structure in Burnaby where the homeless could be linked to Outreach Workers who might be able to get them off of the streets; however, Burnaby still needed something more immediate to address their growing homelessness problem.

## 4.6 Service on the Streets

During the 2006 Homelessness Action Week; which ran from October 16<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Burnaby's Homelessness Task Force organized an event that was aimed at providing services to those living without homes in Burnaby. The event, "Burnaby Reaches out to the Homeless", took place at the Southside Community Church located in the Edmonds area and attracted 87 homeless individuals (Chow, 2006<sup>b</sup>). Task Force members secured the participation of a number of local service providers to participate in the event. Service providers included: a dentist, a foot care specialist (for "street feet"), a health nurse who tested for diseases and/or medical conditions, a mental health worker, an addictions counsellor, and a pet care specialist (Chow, 2006<sup>b</sup>). Task Force member, Wanda Mulholland noted that many people came for specific services after hearing about the upcoming event through word of mouth on the street. It became readily apparent, from this event, that a significant number of homeless people were living on Burnaby's streets, and were in need of a wide range of services and supports. When the Task Force met to debrief after the Homelessness Awareness Day, S/Sgt. Buis suggested they institute a downscaled outreach event, like the one they had just run, every week.

It's great to have an [Outreach Worker], but if you don't have anything to give people and you don't have a place for them to meet it wasn't all going to become a reality.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

Of course, this was easier said than done, but the idea was taken seriously by Cheryl Stogren of PHS; who, then worked for the next two months to make a weekly Outreach Resource Centre become a reality in Burnaby.

Stogren approached, Southside Community Church Pastor, Dan Bennett to see if the congregation at his church would allow an Outreach Resource Centre to run every week at their location. The church agreed to open their doors from 10:00 am until noon every Thursday morning; which meant that a location had been found where the homeless could get access to Progressive's Outreach Services on a weekly basis. The situation was not entirely ideal, given that there was a demonstrable need for a permanent, 7-day a week Outreach Resource Centre, but it was a welcomed opportunity to effect real changes in the lives of people dealing with homelessness in Burnaby.

The Outreach Resource Centre opened for the first time on November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006 and provided people with access to Outreach Workers (of which there were now two full-time positions being funded by BC Housing), non-perishable food, donated clothing and a health nurse from Fraser Health. Cheryl Stogren recalls the Outreach Resource Centre's first day in operation:

It started out very slow, and I think the first week we opened we had about 15 people. We were making the sandwiches and the food and stuff like that.

But, by the second week nearly 40 people came to the Outreach Resource Centre to take advantage of the wealth of services and products that were available to the homeless. Members of the Edmonds community donated items such as food, pillows, bedding, tissues, soap and condoms. The local Starbucks provided the Centre with free coffee.

[The Outreach Resource Centre is] run by volunteers and the staff at Progressive Housing, and everything that goes there, other than the staff wages, is all donations.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

The establishment of an Outreach Resource Centre was a huge accomplishment because it provided Burnaby's homeless population with a place where they could go to have some of their basic needs met (Moreau, 2006).

We started out with, well let's give it a shot, and from there we've been going and we've only closed four times since 2006.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

Burnaby, thus, went from having no services less than two years prior to being able to provide the homeless with a foundation for change in their lives. Nevertheless, there was still more work that needed to be done in order to sustain the Outreach Resource Centre and get Burnaby's homeless off the streets. It was at this point in time that the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness turned to the community for help; which, interestingly, S/Sgt. Buis had already laid the groundwork for one year prior.

## 4.7 Partnering with the Community

In July of 2005 S/Sgt. Buis developed an initiative that he hoped would bring the police closer to the community. Tasked with policing Burnaby's Southeast District, which, at the time, was inundated with homelessness, prostitution and other illicit activity like drug trafficking and public drunkenness, Buis thought it would be a good idea to host a meeting and invite all of the South East District's faith-based institutions to attend. Buis proposed his idea to Ray Allen, the CPAC Chairman. Seeing it as an opportunity to change the public's perception of the police, Allen and the CPAC endorsed Buis' interfaith initiative.

Part of one of my goals is that the police are not regarded as the enemy by the community. Unfortunately, for so long they were regarded as "us" and "them", but it should be the community and the police working together.

-Ray Allen, CPAC Chair

Taken from Kurucz (2005, para. 11)

Allen compiled a list of 45 places of worship within the community, each of whom was invited to attend an Interfaith Meeting on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The meeting was meant to serve three purposes: (1) identify which religious organizations were in the community, (2) discuss the problems facing the community and (3) identify if there were organizations within the churches that could assist in alleviating some of the concerns (Kurucz, 2005). Buis discovered that many of the faith organizations in his district were experiencing significant problems with homelessness, graffiti and drug use on their properties; so, he offered advice to the various faith groups on how they could make their properties safer using the tenets of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). Those who took his advice often saw reductions in illicit activity on their property. What was even more remarkable, though, was that this key group of community members and their congregations started feeling more comfortable bringing their concerns to the RCMP, and were even willing to work with the police to resolve community issues. The relationship was solidified over the next year as two more meetings were held and tools, such as a newly created citizen's complaint form, were provided to community members. Yet still, the Edmonds area was plagued by homelessness and disorder that needed to be addressed. S/Sgt. Buis was then left to draw upon his past policing experience to find a solution to the crisis.

Buis had involved himself in international policing missions throughout his RCMP career; and had witnessed the extensive work that local faith groups do abroad. He knew that there were people in the faith communities' own back yards that also needed help, but, unfortunately, there was a lack of awareness as to the extent of the problem. So, in late 2006, when the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness was in need of community resources to sustain the Outreach Resource Centre, Buis suggested that they call upon the faith community; with whom he had now established a strong partnership.

Ray and I had a discussion and we said we have these things going on but how are we going to fund it? How are we going to supply it? And, that's when we started talking about getting the faith community involved.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

Subsequently, Cheryl Stogren from PHS presented at the November 2006 Interfaith Meeting and asked for the community's support in maintaining the Outreach Resource Centre. Having been given a better understanding of the problems that existed in their community, the faith groups willingly offered their support.

As a result of these meetings there came an awareness of the need.

-Ray Allen, CPAC Chair

John and the CPAC put together a faith community meeting...and out of there came two firm commitments from two different faith-based groups that they would provide a lunch...[it] slowly evolved, the more meetings we attended and asked for commitments from the faith-based groups the more support we got.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

The faith community started out by providing food and clothing donations to the Outreach Resource Centre; however, shortly thereafter they took on an even greater role when they answered the Task Force's call to help shelter the homeless during cold weather.

## 4.8 Extreme Weather Shelter

The winter of 2006 started off with an abnormal bout of cold weather in October that continued into November. The Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness had, for some time, been planning to establish an extreme weather shelter in Burnaby; but now had to scramble to find a location that could be used to bring Burnaby's homeless in from the cold. Given the support they had just received

from the faith community, who helped to sustain the Outreach Resource Centre, the Task Force, once again, turned to them for help. Task Force member, Pastor Norman Oldham took it upon himself to call the various faith institutions in the community in an effort to secure a shelter site. Although the process was rather painstaking, Pastor Oldham's request was received positively by St. Francis De Sales Church, who called him back, less than two hours after he first made contact with them, and said they could set up that very night. The Parish secretary, Lynn Dwan, recruited volunteers from the congregation to help run the shelter under the direction of Lookout Emergency Aid Society, whose staff coordinated the effort and provided all the supplies necessary for the shelter to operate (McMahon, 2006). Burnaby's first temporary Extreme Weather Shelter opened its doors on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2006 and proved to be a huge success. It ran 17 more times that winter and provided 249 bed spaces over a three month period (O'Shannacery, 2008).

## 4.9 Mobile Outreach

In 2008, Cheryl Stogren of PHS came up with an innovative idea to bring their, now well-established, Homeless Outreach Program to *all* of Burnaby's homeless. She petitioned Service Canada to fund a mobile outreach van that could be used to run their outreach operation at more locations throughout the City. Service Canada not only obliged the request, but also provided funding for two more permanent Outreach Workers in Burnaby; which doubled the number of workers to four. On June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 PHS deployed its brand new 2007 Dodge Sprinter Outreach van onto Burnaby's streets (McFee, 2008). The van served as an office on wheels; and was custom-fitted to include a microwave, fax machine, cooler, printer, wireless Internet access and small table, at which Outreach Workers could meet with clients to discuss ways of getting them into a home (McFee, 2008). There was also ample space to store donations of food, clothing and toiletries that could be given out to the homeless. The citizens of Burnaby

supported the initiative by allowing PHS to run its Mobile Outreach Program at various sites in the city. Consequently, PHS expanded its Mobile Outreach to include two locations in North Burnaby and two in South Burnaby; which meant that support services were accessible to *everyone* dealing with homelessness in Burnaby (McFee, 2008).

## 5.0 The Lasting Effects of Partnership

After years of hard work, the grassroots partnerships that sought to address Burnaby's homelessness problem in 2004 finally succeeded in creating a solid foundation of support for those without a home in this City. Burnaby went from having nothing in 2004 to having Outreach Workers, a mobile van, an Outreach Resource Centre, an Extreme Weather Shelter and marked community support for the homeless in 2008. The effects of these accomplishments have been remarkable to say the least.

### 5.0.1 Outreach Work

Burnaby has seen significant improvements in outreach work since the inception of the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness four years ago. There are now two full-time Outreach Worker positions funded by BC Housing; and another two full-time positions funded by Service Canada. Recently, Service Canada agreed to fund an additional  $\frac{3}{4}$  time position; which brings the total number of Outreach Workers in Burnaby to five. The challenge of housing the homeless, however, has not become any easier because the homeless population has grown steadily in size for the past 8 years. Despite this sombre truth, Burnaby's Outreach Workers have helped countless homeless men, women and children.

Hilborn (2006) reported, in a 2006 *BurnabyNow* news article, that Progressive's Outreach Worker at the time, Patricia Pederson, had been in contact with 160 clients, including 56 children in 25 families. In 2007, 102 homeless

individuals had reportedly been housed by PHS since October of the past year (Dickson, 2007). Incredibly, in 2007 alone, the Outreach Resource Centre served more than 1,800 meals to its clients (“Groups put faith into”, 2008). Cheryl Stogren, however, offers an even more dramatic account,

We’ve been really successful in that we’ve been able to create a program that provides really good services to a lot of people...we find housing for about 5-10 people a month...[and] we’ve housed almost 300 people since 2006.

Progressive’s mobile outreach program has now spread to six locations across the city; and operates Monday through Thursday, for a combined total of 13 hours a week. Fraser Health provides a nurse and nurse practitioner at some of the Outreach locations. This allows the homeless to access medical treatment, diagnostics and prescriptions that are otherwise difficult for them to obtain due to lost identification and/or mobility restrictions (Chow, 2006<sup>b</sup>). The Thursday morning Outreach Resource Centre at Southside Community Church is, on average, serving 100 people every week. PHS further estimates that, in total, their mobile Outreach program is being used by up to 200 people per week. Not all of those people are homeless, “but a good percentage are” (Cheryl Stogren). The reason for such a high number of clients is likely that these Outreach services are the only resources available to Burnaby’s homeless.

We provide bagged lunches, we provide hygiene kits, we provide first aid equipment, we provide clothing, socks, underwear...and there’s nowhere else in Burnaby they can get it.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

All of the supports that now exist in Burnaby for the homeless can undoubtedly be attributed to a number of people who sat down, identified a problem and worked together to find a solution.

[That first meeting] evolved into three or four Outreach Workers, statistics on homelessness, all of those kinds of things...so very humble beginnings just from getting those people together and that first phone call from Wanda...It's a classic case of people sitting down, discussing the issues and somehow it evolves into some work being done.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

The Task Force, itself, started because of a few people...talking and communicating with the police, and so between Fraser Health and the City they decided to initiate something.

-Major Elizabeth Grad, Salvation Army

The outreach work being done in Burnaby is certainly having an impact on the lives of Burnaby's homeless; but, even more importantly, it has set the stage for groundbreaking future changes to take place in this City.

#### 5.0.2 *The Interfaith Initiative*

There have now been a total of seven Interfaith Meetings held since 2005. The most recent meeting, in January of 2009, was open to *all* faith groups in Burnaby and drew in over 60 attendees. The Interfaith Meetings have been crucial to the Homeless Outreach Program in Burnaby because the faith community has "responded wonderfully to the need" (Ray Allen). The Outreach Resource Centre and the PHS Mobile Outreach Unit are both supplied by donations from a number of faith-based institutions throughout Burnaby (Granger, 2009). Some churches take turns providing bagged lunches and clothing; whereas others, like Southside Community Church and St. Francis De Sales, offer space for the Outreach Resource Centre and Extreme Weather Shelter to operate (Granger, 2009).

I'm really proud of the faith community for helping out wherever they can in the social community...They saw a way to improve public safety and to try to address homelessness problems in the area, and they are to be commended for their work.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP  
Taken from "Groups put faith into" (2008, para. 3)

None of this would have been possible if Burnaby's faith-based institutions hadn't been organized into meeting.

Up until the Task Force and the hiring of an Outreach Worker, we had no outreach [and] the faith-based community was essentially not organized at all in helping...[but] there has been [greater organization] since [then], and that's been largely due to John Buis from the RCMP organizing the faith community into meeting.

-Major Elizabeth Grad, Salvation Army

It's the perfect example because through talking about the issue people wanted to help, and they still want to help.

-Wanda Mulholland, Task Force Member

### 5.0.3 *The Extreme Weather Shelter*

Burnaby's Extreme Weather Shelter at St Francis Des Sales Church has been open for a total of 92 nights since November of 2006. In that time, the shelter has provided an astounding 1765 bed spaces for homeless individuals. The shelter started out by accommodating less than 10 people per night in 2006; however, this number is now to a near capacity level of 30-35 people each night that the shelter is open. Although, it is not a solution to the problem a shelter is, indeed, a necessary step in helping people get off of the streets.

I don't think a shelter, itself, is the answer to homelessness; but I think it's a stop-gap, a way of gathering people so that you can actually start to work with them...there's been a number of people that came in the first year (to St. Francis) that are, now, not sleeping on the streets in Burnaby anymore.

-Major Elizabeth Grad, Salvation Army

The Extreme Weather Shelter has elicited the participation of dozens of community members, many of whom do not actually belong to the St. Francis De

Sales congregation. Rose Hare, who co-coordinates the shelter effort for the church, noted that she has a volunteer base of 44 people and an additional 14 food providers that supply meals to the shelter on a rotating basis; and, contrary to widespread public perception, when the shelter does operate it does so with minimal disruption to the neighbouring community.

We have been operating, for three years now, an extreme weather shelter with very little incident, very little police involvement, and very little ripple to the community that it's in; but with great benefit. A number of the people that have stayed in that shelter have gone on to find places.

-Major Elizabeth Grad, Salvation Army

Despite the Task Force's tremendous accomplishments, Burnaby is still well behind other municipalities in the provision of services to the homeless. Task Force members have faced an uphill battle for more than four years as they have fought to establish permanent outreach and shelter services in Burnaby. Indeed, there are a number of noteworthy obstacles that have stood, and continue to stand, in the way of ending homelessness in Burnaby.

## 6.0 The Fight for Permanence

Since 2006 PHS and other Task Force members have proclaimed that Burnaby needs a permanent building where people can be linked with outreach workers, overnight shelter, addictions counsellors and mental health professionals (Chow, 2006<sup>a</sup>). From 2005 until the beginning of 2008 the City was adamantly opposed to building a shelter in Burnaby because key decision makers believed that shelters do not actually solve the homelessness problem; and, instead, invite nuisance into the areas in which they are built. Opponents were correct in the sense that not having a home is just one symptom of a greater problem; however, shelters are, in fact, integral to housing people permanently. Dave Brown, of

Lookout Emergency Aid Society, explains what is needed in order to get people off of the street,

There are four levels for getting somebody well...the need for outreach, the need for shelter, the need for transitional housing and the need for independent living units...if somebody has been on the streets for a few years it takes a while to get that person to a place where they're ready to move forward again... [You need to] put a roof over their head, give them somewhere to lie down, fill their belly and *then* work with them.

Thus far, the Task Force has not been able to achieve their goal of establishing a permanent shelter in Burnaby; and, although the City of Burnaby agreed to support the development of an emergency shelter/transitional housing facility on Provincial lands across from BCIT in the spring of 2008, the proposal was promptly rejected by the Province, who had reserved the site for a remand facility (O'Shannacery, 2008). More bad news came in the latter part of 2008 when BC Housing informed the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness that they could no longer hold onto the money that had been set aside, nearly four years earlier, to fund a shelter in Burnaby.

The funding that BC Housing was holding onto for us is now gone.

-Wanda Mulholland, Task Force Member

So, it seems that one of the biggest obstacles to success in Burnaby is a lack of intergovernmental cooperation; which has forced the Task Force to unilaterally address Burnaby's homelessness needs. This, itself, makes permanent changes difficult for Burnaby to implement because the Task Force is still a relatively new body.

We haven't been around long enough, and four years ago we had nothing.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

With homelessness on the rise and the continuation of Task Force activities in Burnaby, one can only hope that the three levels of government will respond more appropriately to homelessness in the coming years. For the time being, though, Burnaby's outreach services continue to be delivered by a number of partners within the community; and of these partnerships, one of the most interesting has surely been that between the RCMP and Burnaby's Southeast District.

## 7.0 Role of the Police in Burnaby's Southeast District

The City of Burnaby is divided into four districts, with each district having its own Community Police Office (CPO). The purpose of CPO's is to allow the police to address and reduce crime through increased community participation and problem solving techniques ("Community Policing", n.d.). In the case of homelessness, this usually manifests itself as the police partnering with the public to refer the homeless to resources that exist within the community. But, what happens when no such resources exist, as was the case four years ago in Burnaby? Well, traditionally, the police might *react* to the situation by moving the homeless out of the area; but, as David Chudnovsky points out, there is a problem with this approach,

Moving them along doesn't solve anything, they'll just move somewhere else...

Instead, S/Sgt. Buis employed a Problem Oriented Policing (POP) solution to homelessness in his district. POP is aimed at resolving an issue by identifying and addressing the root causes of the problem ("Community Policing", n.d.). For the homeless, being without a home is a symptom of a greater social ill. People without homes need a variety of supports that can help them to overcome

problems such as addiction, poverty, mental illness, interpersonal deficits and criminogenic tendencies. When these services were not available in Burnaby, S/Sgt. Buis stepped out of the traditional policing role and sought proactive solutions to the problem.

John said the police need to be more involved in this, not just in a historical police way of dealing with this, but in a community minded way.

-Dave Brown, Lookout Emergency Aid Society

Governments move at probably a glacial pace, and policing we can't do that sometimes. People want to do something now, and now I've given them a focus on what to do and how to do it.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

Buis worked with community member, Wanda Mulholland, to set up the initial meeting that led to the creation of Burnaby's Homelessness Task Force. His office then partnered with the Southeast District CPAC to get the faith-based community more involved with helping in the area. As a result of the RCMP's partnerships in the Southeast District the police have been given better resources to deal with homelessness in Burnaby. Instead of having to either arrest or release individuals they encounter on the streets, officers can now refer people to outreach services in the city. Ultimately, this community-minded approach has not only improved the lives of the people the police come into contact with, but has also reduced their calls for service; which, Buis notes, is a part of the community policing mandate (McQuillan, 2006, para. 4).

I've noticed a lot better interaction between the police and the homeless people because they've got a place to go.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP  
Taken from Granger (2009, para. 8)

I think that becomes a win-win situation, if they get their homeless people that are causing problems on the streets off the street and connected with services then that cuts down

on the number of calls they have to respond to because of the homeless population.

-Major Elizabeth Grad, Salvation Army

Patterson et al. (2008) note that the problem solving approach is actually cheaper than the traditional, reactive police response to homelessness; and, in addition to saving money; Pastor Norman Oldham notes that, “You save their lives too”. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that the RCMP has been moving towards a community-based, preventative model of policing for some time now. Accordingly, the CAPRA problem solving model has been introduced into the police recruit training curriculum to serve as a guide for work within community police offices.

## 7.1 Applying the CAPRA Model

The CAPRA model helps police anticipate, prevent and resolve problems in a neighbourhood using community-based partnerships (“Community Policing”, n.d.). The events that have taken place in Burnaby’s Southeast District are a good example of the RCMP’s ability to resolve community issues using this model.

### *C-Clients:*

There are two types of clients under the CAPRA model, direct and indirect. Direct clients are people that the police come into contact with on a daily basis while delivering service to the community (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2008<sup>a</sup>). In Burnaby’s case, the direct clientele included Wanda Mulholland, who first brought her concerns to S/Sgt. Buis in 2004, and the homeless, who were responsible for widespread criminal activity in the Edmonds area. Indirect clients are people who the police do not necessarily come into contact with on a daily basis, but who are affected by the actions taken to resolve an issue (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2008<sup>a</sup>). For the Southeast District RCMP indirect clients included all those citizens and businesses that were affected by homelessness in the area.

*A-Acquire/Analyse Information:*

It is important to fully understand a problem before implementing a solution. That's why; in 2004 S/Sgt. Buis not only researched statistics on homelessness and crime in his district, but also held a meeting with local residents and support agencies to discuss the extent of the homelessness situation. The meeting spawned the creation of the Task Force on Homelessness; who then went on to further quantify the problem in the 2005 Woodward Report.

*P-Partnerships:*

Partnerships are important because they allow the RCMP to more fully address problems within the community. Homelessness is not exclusively a police problem because being homeless is not illegal, but some homeless people *do* commit illegal acts. So, in order to improve the situation in Burnaby's Southeast District it was necessary to involve people and agencies that were capable of tackling the root causes of homelessness.

It's a lot about making connections with the people that can help us.

-Cpl. Jennifer Rose, Burnaby RCMP

Accordingly, the RCMP, working through the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness, successfully partnered with Progressive Housing Society, Lookout Emergency Aid Society, Fraser Health, private citizens and the faith community to establish resources that would help support the homeless.

*R-Response:*

After the problem has been identified and partnerships have been struck the next step is to work with partners to develop a plan of action (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2008<sup>a</sup>). In this case, the action plan was to establish a Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness that could work towards providing services and

supports for Burnaby's homeless population. This response resulted in the hiring of Outreach Workers, the establishment of an Outreach Resource Centre/mobile van, the opening of an Extreme Weather Shelter and, ultimately, a reduction in homeless-related criminal activity in the District.

*A-Assessment of Action Taken*

Ensuring that the action taken was, in fact, appropriate is the final step in the CAPRA problem solving model. Assessment of RCMP involvement in Task Force activities and of the effects outreach services have had is ongoing in Burnaby. A number of newspaper articles have highlighted the success of Burnaby's Task Force on Homelessness and have described the impact of the RCMP's partnership with the faith community; however, there has been very little in the way of formal research aimed at evaluating the impact these strategies have had on homelessness in Burnaby.

As mentioned above, the RCMP's proactive approach to addressing homelessness in Burnaby has given officers new options for dealing with the homeless. Officers can now refer people to Burnaby's newly created outreach services; which has not only reduced calls for service in the District, but has also strengthened the RCMP's relationship with the homeless.

I think the RCMP are doing a fairly good job because what I see with the RCMP is...yeah they'll deal with the criminality, but when it comes to the other end, from what I understand they are looking at a more proactive approach.

-Pastor Norman Oldham, Task Force Member

Ted believes that RCMP Officers treat the homeless with respect. He went on to explain that, while he was on the streets in Burnaby, officers listened to his concerns and even offered to take him to places where he could get some help. Ted's impression of the RCMP seems to be a shared one amongst the homeless population. Daryl noted that RCMP Members are better than "city cops" because they treat you with humanity. Steve, in reference to the police, remarked, "Out

here (Burnaby) they're not too bad". When asked about how the RCMP treated him, Bill responded, "They are very nice to me".

Evidently, the POP approach that S/Sgt. Buis pursued in 2004 has had remarkable effects. Homeless people in Burnaby are now able to access the supports they need in order to turn their lives around; the community feels safer, the homeless feel more respected and a number of lasting partnerships have evolved out of the need for action. So, what more can the police do to deal with homelessness?

## 7.2 How can the Police Continue to Address Homelessness in Burnaby?

The RCMP in Burnaby have done such a good job with homelessness in this city that what is needed is nothing more than a continuation and extension of the actions they have already taken.

### 7.2.1 *Partner with the Community*

One of the most important things that the police can do to address homelessness is to keep working with the community to find solutions to the problem. Community policing is about encouraging citizens to take an active interest in community issues because the diversity that exists within a community makes it well-suited to tackling complex problems. The police can bring people together to identify and resolve problems in an area; and, although the police may not necessarily be responsible for solving the problem, they can certainly be a part of the solution.

Police officers need to be a part of a community team, which builds their policy together.

-David Chudnovsky, MLA

It's about taking an active interest in and working closely with [the community]...community minded, preventative

work is crucial; and that's not a standard policing approach to things, and I think it makes all the difference.

-Wanda Mulholland, Task Force Member

Hence, the police have an important role to play as an organizing body for change in a community; which is exactly what has occurred in Burnaby's Southeast District over the past four years. S/Sgt. Buis explains that developing a partnership with the community involves,

Getting to know the people, going to public events, going to private events, talking to people, and also when they call we listen.

Mulholland further suggests that police throughout Burnaby can follow the Southeast District's lead by, "Meeting with people, talking about their concerns, and giving them options." And, while problems such as homelessness are complex in nature, community policing requires that the police continually strive to make the community a safer place; even if this means stepping out of their traditional enforcement role.

I've seen the problem, I know it's not an easy solution, but rather than bash my head against the wall [I've said] what *can* we do, not what can't we do.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

### *7.2.2 Link the Homeless to Services*

S/Sgt. Buis contends that police haven't been given the tools they need to help the homeless; however, with the creation of outreach services and an Extreme Weather Shelter in Burnaby, this is starting to change. Police officers now have more options to choose from when they deal with the homeless. Instead of being forced to either arrest or release a homeless individual, officers can link the homeless with the services offered by PHS and/or find shelter for people on cold nights. This is important for the prevention of future offending because linking the

homeless with Outreach Workers may encourage them to leave their criminal lives behind them as they transition into a home. Therefore, it is advisable that officers not only familiarize themselves with the services and supports that are available for the homeless in Burnaby, but also that they connect the homeless with these services, during the course of their duties.

### *7.2.3 Inform Public and Politicians on the Homelessness Issue*

Since the police are the frontline agency charged with responding to concerns in the community, they are often the first to identify serious problems that exist in an area. Thus, it is important for the police to ensure that they increase public awareness of issues, like homelessness, that are believed to be responsible for causing disorder in a community. Burnaby's Medical Health Officer, Dr. Nadine Loewen of Fraser Health, would like to see the RCMP continue to raise awareness around homelessness, "Because when they are concerned, when they say it, it's taken seriously". Moreover, their thorough understanding of community demographics makes the police an ideal source to turn to for solutions that might successfully resolve the problem.

The police, most importantly, can be part of the solution in identifying the issues that surround the people they have contact with. They may not be able to solve a problem like housing, but they can certainly be a big factor in what needs to be done for the individuals they're finding.

-Mayor Derek Corrigan

### *7.2.4 Continue to Treat the Homeless with Respect*

Treating the homeless with respect and dignity is something that the RCMP has done well in Burnaby. It is important, however, that officers continue to do this because being treated respectfully encourages the homeless to ask for and accept help from others; which is crucial to ending homelessness in *any* community.

From the police perspective I'd like to see them basically model what John is doing...to be able to actually talk with them (the homeless) without having to raise their voice at them, without having to say, 'move along we don't want you here', without having to treat them like criminals until they've actually committed a crime, because being poor is not a crime.

-Major Elizabeth Grad, Salvation Army

Rose Hare, the Co-Coordinator for the St. Francis De Sales Extreme Weather Shelter, believes that there is still some work to be done to improve communication between the police and the homeless; but, by and large, the RCMP appear to be doing a good job working with Burnaby's homeless population.

[The police] talk to the Lookout workers...they're not really talking to the homeless...seeing them is one thing, interacting with them is another.

Rose Hare, St. Francis De Sales Church

Despite the RCMP's good work, it is important to remember that homelessness is not strictly a police matter. It is, instead, just one symptom of a number of social deficits that cannot simply be grouped together and assigned to one person, agency or department to resolve; which is why we must *all* take on the responsibility of bringing about an end to homelessness.

## 8.0 Who is Responsible for Ending Homelessness?

Homelessness is a difficult condition to classify. It is not solely a police matter because being homeless is not illegal, it is not exclusively a health matter because many homeless people suffer from nothing more than minor health deficits, nor is it simply an income problem because, as Steve explains,

Even if you give people the money you're going to have a problem here, you're not going to get anybody off of the

streets by giving them two months rent...because they're so used to having everything against them and nothing working out... [So,] what's needed for a lot of people...when you actually have that rent money in your hand...is someone to be with you, get out there and get a place right away.

Homelessness is also not just a housing matter because there are many people that, after having been housed, end up back on the streets a few weeks or months later.

You get somebody off the street, you work with them a little bit, you get them into a place to live and the next thing you know the person's back out onto the street again in short order...it's not that he doesn't care, he just doesn't know how to live there.

-Dave Brown, Lookout Emergency Aid Society

Clearly, then, homelessness cannot be categorized under any one department or agency because it encompasses countless social ills.

It's not an easy problem...there's just too many facets to this because many of the people have mental health issues, addiction issues or just difficult to get along with issues.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

And, although the government would normally be responsible for taking on such issues; in the case of homelessness, it has been difficult to determine exactly which level of government should address the issue.

Guess where homelessness is? It's right across all three levels (of government)...It's not a simple thing.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

Thus, the challenge is to figure out who "owns" homelessness,

Nobody really owns homelessness, it's not like a heart attack where it's clear where a heart attack belongs, or it's not like it's a flu vaccine, or it's not like it's a flat tire; you have a place where you take care of that. But, homelessness there's

so many factors, like who owns the fact that there's no toilet? The answer is nobody...

-Dr. Nadine Loewen, Fraser Health Authority

If the answer is that *nobody* is responsible for dealing with homelessness then we must *all* play a role in bringing about its end; especially since we all *allowed* the homelessness crisis to evolve in the first place.

No one should be surprised that this is happening because they consistently elected governments that indicated they wouldn't do anything about it. You don't arrive at this situation overnight; you arrive at this situation as a result of government policies that have been implemented over two decades.

-Mayor Derek Corrigan

Laudably, a number of Burnaby's community members took this collective responsibility seriously; and formed partnerships to address Burnaby's homelessness problem. The accomplishments that have stemmed from this diverse group of citizens and agencies working with the municipal, provincial and federal governments to address homeless in Burnaby have undoubtedly been remarkable; but, there is still more work to be done. Accordingly, this researcher has a number of recommendations that will further improve the homelessness situation in Burnaby.

## 9.0 Recommendations

**#1 *The Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments need to work together and with the community to develop an integrated plan to end homelessness in Burnaby:***

One of the most significant obstacles to ending homelessness in Burnaby has been a lack of intergovernmental cooperation. To date, no level of government has taken on Burnaby's homelessness issue as their own. Instead, the municipal, provincial and federal governments continue to pass the buck to one another.

The province keeps telling us that without the municipal government taking a lead, it's not going to happen (referring to supported housing).

-Dr. Nadine Loewen, Fraser Health Authority

Whereas Burnaby's Mayor Corrigan asserts that,

In British Columbia the provincial government retained social services and never delegated it to cities, so we have no responsibility for social services at all...and we have no funds to be able to look after any of those programs...The reality is that constitutionally...and tax wise the responsibility rests with them.

What is needed, then, is for *all* the levels of government to sit at the same table with community representatives and work towards a solution to the problem.

We need to get all three levels sitting down and talking in the same place, on the same page.

-Major Elizabeth Grad, Salvation Army

The senior levels of government, the federal and provincial governments, have to listen to the municipal leaders... [Because] they know their communities best and have a lot to offer in terms of...making a plan that will have an impact on their community.

-David Chudnovsky, MLA

Unlike neighbouring municipalities, Burnaby has yet to formally enact a plan to end homelessness. Five and ten year plans have proven useful in other communities to successfully reduce homelessness because they create realistic goals that governments and communities can hold themselves accountable to (Patterson et al., 2008). However, Mayor Corrigan explains that the City cannot implement an action plan without support from senior levels of government because there is not enough money in the municipal budget to sustain such an endeavour. If the City of Burnaby were to single-handedly rectify the homelessness problem they would run a substantial deficit; which would likely result in an

inability to provide proper funding for the services the City is constitutionally and financially responsible for. Clearly, there needs to be greater cooperation between the three levels of government before homelessness can be effectively addressed. Government intervention on its own, though, will not put an end to homelessness.

The community must also play a role in addressing the issue because the support of local residents and local aid organizations is central to ensuring the success of governmental initiatives. For example, if any level of government chose to build a Drop-in Centre in Burnaby the community in which the centre was to be built would have to support the project, Outreach Workers from PHS would need to be involved and local Churches should be mobilized to supply the centre. Furthermore, any action plan that the government implements should be guided by the experiences of community representatives, like Progressive Housing Society and Lookout Emergency Aid Society, who have dealt with the problem first-hand and know what does and does not work. Thus, the solution to Burnaby's homeless problem needs to come jointly from the community *and* all three levels of government.

**#2 *The City of Burnaby must advocate for their homelessness problem:***

Primarily, what is needed from the municipality is not more money, but, instead, more support. Burnaby's municipal leaders need to fully understand the extent of the homelessness problem in their community; and, then, expose the situation to both their constituents and their senior government counterparts. Municipal leaders must also be prepared to quell the concerns of people who are opposed to taking the necessary actions to rectify the situation.

There is the notion among some that if you provide services to homeless people you increase the number of homeless people, I think that's frankly wrong. It's like saying if you build a hospital more people will get sick, it's not true...if you provide services to homeless people, people who are homeless will get the services they need.

-David Chudnovsky, MLA

In order for the homelessness situation to improve in Burnaby the issue needs to be taken more seriously by local officials; who must insist that the two senior levels of government join them in resolving the city's homelessness problem. Until this happens, changes will come slowly because they will continue to be community-based.

**#3 *Burnaby needs an emergency shelter coupled with supportive and affordable housing:***

There is no permanent emergency shelter in Burnaby that can bridge the gap for people like Robert who are temporarily homeless as a result of family breakdown and/or job loss. The only option Outreach Workers have in Burnaby is to set people up with rental accommodation; which means that people who are temporarily homeless must live on the streets during the interim period.

That little bridging that a shelter would do is really important.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

If you don't have a shelter, if you don't start from there then all the rest of it...it just doesn't work.

-Dave Brown, Lookout Emergency Aid Society

Emergency shelters are a necessary part of the housing continuum because they prevent the newly homeless from entering the cycle of homelessness, and bridge the gap between the streets and a home for those who are street entrenched. However, on their own, emergency shelters are not a solution to homelessness.

We need emergency shelters because we have an emergency, but...emergency shelters aren't homes.

-David Chudnovsky, MLA

Providing *just* a shelter is one step up from what we're doing, providing a roof over their head but nothing really to make any changes...keeping somebody in a shelter for 30 days and [then putting] them back on the street is not going to solve the problem...there's got to be a step in between and it's got to be supportive.

-Major Elizabeth Grad, Salvation Army

Supportive housing is necessary for hard-to-house individuals with mental health issues, addictions and/or social deficits. Cheryl Stogren notes that Burnaby is without supportive housing. PHS Outreach Workers are the only resource available to the newly housed; and, although, they do their best to assist people, there are only five workers to cover all of Burnaby. This means that most of the support is off-site support; which is, sometimes, insufficient to address the extensive needs of newly housed individuals.

A lot of people we work with have special needs in the fact that they need supportive housing, like on-site support, at least transitionally.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

Supportive housing is crucial to ensuring that people remain housed because there are many homeless people that lose their social and life skills during their time on the streets. Accordingly, David Chudnovsky believes that, "We need housing first plus the supports necessary to be successful"; and, there are a number of people who would agree with his assertion.

Supported housing is really, really important...the way your going to end homelessness is a home for *everyone*.

-Dr. Nadine Loewen, Fraser Health Authority

You need to have a solution that takes a person into another system to break the cycle.

-Mayor Derek Corrigan

We need to have a shelter, and to have transitional housing for people here as a beginning; because until we get that, all of what we are doing here is band-aiding.

-Wanda Mulholland, Task Force Member

Further to supportive housing, Burnaby is in need of more affordable housing for the thousands of people that are at risk of becoming homeless (Woodward & Associates, 2005).

One way people can deal with the low income is by more affordable housing, more social housing and thus far Vancouver has it, New West has it, every other place has it except Burnaby.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

Ultimately, then, what is needed is a continuum of support that should include an emergency shelter and a large stock of supportive and affordable housing.

We're lacking a continuum [of housing and support]...we're just starting from scratch.

-Cheryl Stogren, Progressive Housing Society

One of the biggest barriers to the provision of sufficient housing and support services are the capital costs associated with such a project. Patterson et al. (2008) estimate that providing adequate housing and support to BC's absolute homeless population would require a \$784 million capital investment. This is an incredible dollar amount that cannot be absorbed by one government body alone; therefore, providing a continuum of housing and support in Burnaby must be a joint venture.

The municipal government has to be prepared to give up some of its land for an emergency shelter, transitional housing and affordable housing. Moreover, governmental and non-governmental social housing projects should be fast-tracked through the municipal land-use applications process; and *all* efforts should be made by the City to offer land for the development of such projects.

There are lots of ways [the city] could assist that wouldn't necessarily cost them anything... [They could] assist with finding an appropriate site, bylaws, rezoning and minimizing fares for providing the structure.

-Wanda Mulholland, Task Force Member

The City of Burnaby, however, cannot take on the development of social housing projects; which is why the two senior levels of government need to be involved.

Mayor Corrigan explains that for every dollar of tax collected eight cents goes to the municipal government; the rest is divided between the provincial and federal governments. Accordingly, the two senior levels of government are the only ones with the financial resources that are necessary to fund the development of housing and supports in municipalities throughout British Columbia. Although, the province contributes a large amount of money to social housing, their contribution has been insufficient to meet the need. Affordable and supportive housing is not being built at a pace fast enough to keep up with the growing homeless population. Admittedly, a required investment of \$784 million is no easy feat; which is why the federal government needs to subsidize capital costs. Both levels of government may also want to consider reinstating their social housing programs, to address the lack of affordable housing being built by the private sector.

The provincial and federal governments have taken away any of the incentives for people building more rental housing. There are no tax deductions for it, there's no encouragement for it. So, as far as the private sector going in and building rental housing, it's almost non-existent.

-Mayor Derek Corrigan

We need the Feds to get involved in building housing...[that is] affordable for certain population groups (i.e. persons on welfare).

-Dave Brown, Lookout Emergency Aid Society

**#4 Burnaby is in need of a permanent outreach facility:**

Currently, Burnaby's homeless can access outreach services through the mobile outreach van four days out of the week; however, each centre only operates for two or three hours a day. With an estimated 250 people homeless in Burnaby, the demand is high enough for a permanent Outreach Resource Centre to be opened that would operate during daylight hours on all days of the week, including weekends.

I like the idea of what's going on right now with the van...it would be nice to have some kind of permanent structure one day in any of the four districts that could provide that on a drop-in basis.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP

Until which time as an emergency shelter and supportive housing are available in Burnaby, the homeless will continue having to meet their basic needs alone; which, as Dr. Loewen explains, is in and of itself challenging.

[An Outreach Worker asked the homeless what their top needs were in 2005] it wasn't housing; it was food, showers, toilets, laundry. Just the basic things, keeping clean and eating...we've had some advancement of the food, but we're still struggling to find a shower...so we're talking about the *basic* things still.

This challenge can be made easier by providing the homeless with one location where they can go to shower, eat, receive clothing and be linked to health services. Furthermore, a permanent Outreach Resource Centre would be an ideal place to connect the homeless with Outreach Workers who may be able to assist them with finding housing.

A lot of people need help getting into a place.

-Steve

This is about building something like a centre where people can get connected...the Outreach Worker can connect them up with some of the services that are available and slowly,

but surely start to move them up until they get hooked in...with whoever they need.

-Dave Brown, Lookout Emergency Aid Society

Again, government support is needed to make a permanent Outreach Resource Centre a reality. The City of Burnaby must readily approve proposed sites for the development; and if proposed sites are deemed unsuitable then the municipality should offer *viable* alternative locations. As well, the province should provide sufficient funding for the project, as it has in the past for other municipalities (British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, 2000). Finally, it would be wise to continue operating the Mobile Outreach Unit, even if a permanent Drop-in Centre were built, because Mobile Outreach brings a number of services directly to homeless people with mobility and/or other restrictions who would otherwise be unable to access help on their own.

**#5 *The public must make an effort to break down the barriers that exist between themselves and the homeless:***

Jason and Ted, two formerly homeless individuals, both agree that there is a general air of disrespect for the homeless. Similarly, Robert asserts that, “There’s a lot of people that just look down on you”. Homeless people are consistently ignored on the streets, and are often shot down when they initiate *any* form of conversation. Cheryl Stogren is quoted in a 2009 news article as saying,

The worst thing we can do is think of these people as just addicts or riff raff.

-Taken from McQuillan (2009, para. 37)

McQuillan (2009, para. 38) contends that,

People who are already marginalized should not be made to feel invisible.

Doing so, only stigmatizes the homeless further, and promotes learned helplessness/hopelessness since most homeless people will not ask for help because they fear being rejected. The best way to overcome this social barrier is for laypersons to interact more with the homeless, and make them feel included in society. Jason and Ted explain that this would take nothing more than to acknowledge and interact with the homeless, even if you are unable or unwilling to give them money. Cheryl Stogren agrees,

You can always say you don't give people money, but at least you can engage them in conversation...that means a lot to people. Just to acknowledge that I see you, I'm not walking by and averting my eyes...how hard is it to say hello to somebody?

-Taken from McQuillan (2009, para. 41)

Interacting with the homeless communicates to them that they are wanted members of society; which encourages them to ask for help. Therefore, *everyone* has a part to play in ending homelessness, even if the part is as simple as giving homeless people the time of day.

## **#6 *The community needs to lobby for change:***

Unrelenting political pressure must come from the public before the government will take swift action against homelessness. Politicians are unable to simply respond to popular public opinion because it changes so often. This means that there has to be a demonstrable problem accompanied by a persistent lobby before governments will step in to address the issue. Right now, the homelessness issue is starting to gain momentum across BC; however, the lobby has not been strong enough to incite groundbreaking policy changes.

What needs to happen is there needs to be enough people who just say this is intolerable and needs to be fixed...If it's only ever sandwiches and socks there will never be a long

term solution. So, you need the sandwiches and socks...but, ultimately, you also need campaigns.

-Dr. Nadine Loewen, Fraser Health Authority

It's a question of whether or not the public is prepared to step up to the plate and demand that their senior levels of government provide the resources that are necessary to do what needs to be done in their communities.

-Mayor Derek Corrigan

**#7 *Provincially-run and, preferably, community-based support services should be established for people dealing with severe mental illnesses and/or addictions:***

The provincial government's decision to close down institutions for the mentally ill has created a massive influx of homelessness because adequate community-based supports were never provided to deinstitutionalized persons. Right now, there is very little support for mentally ill persons living in the community. Only those people who pose a danger to themselves or others find their way into a care facility.

I can tell you a big problem out here, there's no help for anybody with mental issues, and the police got their hides tied because they got nowhere to take them.

-Steve

Accordingly, Burnaby's Mayor Corrigan believes that we need, "to reopen facilities for those who are mentally ill". The other option, which may be even cheaper than institutionalization, is to start providing the necessary supports for mentally ill persons living in the community (Patterson et al., 2008). For a detailed explanation of the required supports please refer to Simon Fraser University's CARMHA Report (Patterson et al., 2008).

The City of Burnaby may also want to consider implementing Vancouver's "Car 86" program to help police better respond to homeless people suffering from severe mental illnesses. The program pairs a plain-clothes police officer with a trained psychiatric nurse who can provide on-the-spot assessments of mentally ill

persons and can suggest an appropriate course of action on a case-by-case basis. Car 86 ensures that mentally ill persons who need treatment will, in fact, receive treatment; which, in turn, saves police time and resources. Cst. Simard, of the Burnaby RCMP, supports the Car 86 program. He explains that police officers are not trained to deal with and assess mental illness; instead, they are expected to exert immediate control over a situation. Pastor Norman Oldham believes that having a psychiatric nurse on hand could prevent potentially dangerous situations from escalating because mental health professionals “can diffuse a lot of the situations”. Therefore the Car 86 program can not only save resources, but lives as well.

In some cases [the police] didn't know [the offender was] psychiatric and the person got shot.

-Pastor Norman Oldham

Due to Burnaby's population size it may not be feasible to have a full-time psychiatric nurse working with the police on a daily basis. An alternative, though, might be to have a 24/7 on-call mental health professional, who may also ride with officers during the busiest times of the week. Any variation of a Car 86 program in Burnaby should be a joint municipal and provincial venture as it would involve both policing and health care professionals.

**#8 *The Province should provide sufficient outreach services to the homeless:***

Outreach services in Burnaby are funded by grants from the Provincial and Federal governments, but are delivered solely by PHS, a not-for-profit agency. The grants have allowed for the hiring of less than five outreach workers, which is an insufficient number to serve all of Burnaby's 250 homeless individuals. So far, the Provincial approach to helping the homeless has been very hands off. Indeed, there are no full-time government social workers assisting Burnaby's homeless.

Why would a person who is homeless not have a social worker? Who in the world needs a social worker more than someone who is homeless...how can you have a system, in which the very people trained to deal with your problem, you don't have one?

-Mayor Derek Corrigan

PHS Outreach Workers lack the funding and resources necessary for them to single-handedly find housing for all of Burnaby's homeless. The workers have no access to social housing databases, and must resort to searching for homes for the homeless on websites like "craigslist.ca". So, in order to house *all* the homeless the Provincial government must choose to either fund the PHS Outreach Program more heavily or provide workers of its own to work directly with the homeless on the street.

## 10.0 Why do we need to put an end to Homelessness?

David Chudnovsky insists that there are three reasons why we should end homelessness. Firstly,

It's wrong, it is wrong ethically and morally that we should have people who don't have any place to live. It's a human right to have warm, safe, secure shelter.

Canada is a developed nation with a high standard of living. The citizens of this country should not tolerate social conditions, like homelessness, that would normally characterize third world countries. David Chudnovsky notes that, "simply providing a roof makes a huge difference" in the lives of the homeless. Surely, Canadians have money to spare to help improve the lives of their less fortunate neighbours.

There should be [services for the homeless], for how much money there is out there, how much gets wasted on stupid things, there should be money given to people that want the help.

-Steve

For those who are not convinced that homelessness is simply wrong, David Chudnovsky offers a second argument,

Homelessness is a disruption to our communities...there's people who are on the street and are involved sometimes in behaviours that are illegal.

Communities that have to deal with homelessness are often littered with garbage, spent needles, used condoms and a number of other health hazards. Moreover, businesses in the area lose customers as a result of homeless people squatting on their property; and residents experience increases in their fear of crime.

There's...this undocumented thing called the fear of crime, and if you have people that you don't know wandering through your neighbourhood people feel unsafe.

-S/Sgt. John Buis, Burnaby RCMP  
Taken from Granger (2009, para. 9)

Putting an end to homelessness may rid many communities of antisocial behaviours like public drug use, prostitution, and panhandling; which, in turn, would reduce crime *and* fear of crime in an area. Therefore, it is in the community's best interest to find a solution to the homelessness problem.

Lastly, if people are unmoved by the first two arguments to end homelessness, David Chudnovsky has one more contention for those who are financially driven,

It's cheaper to solve the problem of homelessness than to do what we're doing.

Patterson et al. (2008, p. 11) estimate that providing the homeless with housing and the supports necessary to remain housed will save society

approximately \$32.8 million/year. This estimate derives from the fact that the current approach to homelessness is incredibly draining on social institutions like health care, law enforcement/corrections and social welfare (Patterson et al, 2008).

What we're doing is incredibly expensive. What we're doing is more expensive than providing homes and providing supports because we pay for police and courts and jails and ambulances and paramedics and emergency rooms and acute care beds and social workers and on and on and on...on average we're paying \$17,000 a year more not to house people than to house them.

-David Chudnovsky, MLA

The only caveat to these savings is that providing the supported housing necessary would require a capital investment of \$784 million. This cost would, however, be absorbed over time by the yearly cost avoidance (Patterson et al., 2008). Thus, contrary to public perception, housing the homeless would actually *save* taxpayer dollars.

With that in mind, it must be clearly stated that the longer we wait to dedicate the resources necessary to end homelessness, the more expensive it will become to fix the problem. The number of people dealing with homelessness in British Columbia continues to grow; and as each year passes, more and more communities are feeling the effects of the crisis. Society must take swift action against homelessness before it is too late to reverse the effects of this spiralling epidemic. The long road to recovery will require cooperation from all levels of the government and must include partnerships with various members of the community; but with unwavering public and governmental support homelessness *can* be overcome.

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## *Appendix A*

### Detailed Methodology:

Homelessness is a complicated phenomenon that cannot be explained using numbers alone. Although all homeless people share a common economic condition, their reasons for being impoverished vary widely from person to person. During the beginning stages of my research I discovered that there was an abundance of quantitative information available on the number of people dealing with homelessness, mental illness, drug addictions and combinations thereof (refer to the references section of this report for a complete list of these past publications). Consequently, and in light of the diversity that exists within the homeless population, I chose to take a qualitative approach to understanding homelessness in Burnaby and what is being done to address it.

Aside from the Woodward Report in 2005 there has been very little research conducted on homelessness in Burnaby. The only other records I found were in the form of local newspaper articles that reported on various Homelessness Task Force activities and events. This report was, thus, written in response to the lack of explanatory and evaluative research available on homelessness in this City. A qualitative approach was ideal for telling the story of what has happened in Burnaby, and reporting on the effects these actions have had on the lives of people dealing with homelessness. Based on archival, observational and interview-based research this paper sought to answer the following five research questions:

1. How did the City of Burnaby come to have a homelessness problem?
2. How has homelessness affected Burnaby?
3. What has been done to address homelessness in Burnaby?
4. How have the RCMP responded to homelessness in Burnaby, and what role should the police play in further addressing this issue?

5. What more needs to be done to end homelessness in Burnaby?

*Archival Research:*

The preliminary part of my project involved reviewing literature on homelessness in Burnaby. This included documents prepared by the Burnaby Homelessness Task Force, news articles published by the *Burnaby Now* and *Burnaby Newsleader* newspapers and a rather large report written by Jim Woodward and Associates (known as the Woodward Report). Though it is important to understand homelessness in Burnaby, one must also recognize that homelessness is, in fact, a provincial issue (Chudnovsky, 2008). Accordingly, I expanded my literature review to include reports that had been published in other municipalities. Some of these reports included Vancouver's *3 Ways to Home* publication "Still on our Streets", David Chudnovsky's "Finding Our Way Home" and the Province's "Local Responses to Homelessness". My archival research involved a total of 38 newspaper articles, 7 major reports and 18 other publications.

*Observational Research:*

A large part of this research involved observing the homeless situation in Burnaby. I carried a notebook with me at all times and recorded various sightings and statements as I toured homeless encampments with the RCMP and visited outreach centers on my own. I took pictures of squats and of homeless individuals (with their permission), in addition to making note of the living conditions that exist within this population. In total I performed approximately 40 hours of observation over a 3 month period

Interestingly, observation turned out to be an effective way to obtain interviews. Some people who noticed my presence alongside the police and at outreach centers would approach me to find out more information about what I was doing. After explaining my research project to them a few individuals

volunteered to be interviewed, and some even directed me towards other potential interviewees.

*Interview-Based Research:*

Interviews for this research were based on a semi-structured approach (Palys, 2003). In most cases, an interview guide was used to initiate dialogue and keep interviews on track; however, all probing questions were based on interviewee responses to the structured questions. This allowed for free-flowing conversation; which was crucial for theme development. Archival research assisted in the development of a preliminary interview guide; but, structured questions were also based on interviewee responses. Accordingly, my interview guides changed as more interviews were conducted. Copies of these guides have been retained on file by the RCMP.

This study utilized a non-probabilistic, purposive sampling procedure (Palys, 2003). Simply put, I chose to go to my sample population rather than have it come to me. This was necessary given the characteristics of my population of interest and the purpose of my research. This project was aimed at explaining and evaluating what has been done to address homelessness in Burnaby. Hence, my sample frame comprised of only those persons who are involved with homelessness in Burnaby. This includes service providers, police officers, politicians, health workers, volunteers and, of course, the homeless themselves. Interviews were often recorded digitally, but in some cases a notebook approach was used.

I conducted three recorded and seven unrecorded interviews with homeless individuals. Notation was used to highlight the key points from unrecorded interviews. This method was suitable for interviews in places where other homeless people were present because the communication was relatively inconspicuous. Almost all other interviews with service providers, politicians, police officers etc. were recorded. In total 14 non-homeless interviews were conducted; 12 of which

were recorded. The two unrecorded interviews were casual in nature, and, again, a notebook was used during each conversation. A total of 24 interviews were conducted; including 10 interviews with the homeless. However, one unrecorded homeless interview had to be excluded for ethical reasons; leaving 23 total interviews, nine of which were with the homeless.

Most of my interviews were pre-arranged via telephone; but, interviews with the homeless could not be obtained in this manner for obvious reasons. Therefore, I gained access to the homeless population in two ways. One strategy I used was to attend homeless outreach centers and establish a rapport with the clientele. After I was able to secure the trust of an individual I would ask if they wanted to participate in an interview. Every person I spoke with in this environment agreed to be interviewed. Police resources and connections were also used to make contact with the homeless population. I was fortunate enough to be paired with a Neighbourhood Liaison Officer who agreed to take me to known homeless encampments and introduce me to the individuals squatting in these areas. This gave me exclusive access to the homeless population in their natural element. It also allowed me to meet and sometimes interview the homeless in a safe environment. The only downside to this approach was that occasionally interviews could not be conducted due to legal issues that arose during initial contact with the homeless individual.

#### *Ethics:*

Ethics played an important role in this research given the nature my topic. Prior to beginning my research an Ethics Proposal was submitted to and approved by the SFU Criminology Field Practice Coordinator. The proposal was also reviewed and approved by an agency supervisor. This study was deemed low-risk; however, precautions were taken to obtain informed consent and respect participant rights to confidentiality.

Verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to beginning an interview. The informed consent consisted of an explanation of the purpose and scope of the research and a brief on confidentiality. Interviewees were given the choice to remain anonymous; and confidentiality was to be assured through anonymity. No participants, including those who were homeless, wished to exercise their right to remain anonymous. However, in the interests of protecting my most vulnerable participants, I assigned pseudonyms to all homeless interviewees.

In my proposal I stated that I would record all interviews with the homeless; however, I soon realized that this procedure was both impractical and unnecessary. Some interviews with the homeless flowed naturally from normal conversation and were short in duration. Therefore, pausing to bring in a recorder and obtain further consent would have interrupted the flow of the interview, and was likely to scare off some participants. It can be dangerous in the homeless subculture to be seen talking to people who are even remotely affiliated with the police. Therefore, sitting in a public place with a researcher who is representing the RCMP, and recording the conversation might suggest to others that the interviewee is a “rat”. I did not want to put my participants in such a precarious position; so, I made a conscious effort to conduct recorded interviews in venues that were out of sight to other homeless individuals.

As I mentioned earlier, one interview with a homeless individual had to be excluded from my research. In my proposal I made a commitment not to interview minors in order to circumvent any ethical issues that might arise. During the course of my research one youth was interviewed; and, although the interview content did not raise any ethical concerns, I have chosen not to include the conversation in my report so as to uphold my ethical obligations.

### *Coding & Analysis:*

All recorded interviews were replayed in full, and coded under various categories that emerged during playback. After coding was complete, matrixes were analyzed and themes were drawn from both impact statements and common responses among participants. Impact statements can best be described as statements that are powerful enough to communicate an important message on their own without the need for further explanation. The following is an example of an impact statement:

We need emergency shelters because we have an emergency.

-David Chudnovsky

Digitally recorded interviews, field notes and coding matrixes have all been archived by the RCMP.

*Limitations:*

This study is primarily limited by its qualitative design. Qualitative research involves conducting in-depth interviews; which can be very time consuming. Due to a relatively short research period my sample size seems small when compared to other studies. In actuality the sample size was quite large for a qualitative research project; however, I acknowledge that my sample may still be difficult to generalize from. My sampling procedure was non-probabilistic; which means these results are not representative of the general population, but they are representative of my sample population. I explored the homeless subculture to an extent that was sufficient enough to draw conclusions about this population. However, my conclusions are limited to homelessness in Burnaby and may not necessarily be representative of homelessness in other municipalities, provinces and/or countries.

This study could have been improved if the research had taken place over a longer period of time because more interviews could have been conducted and more research could have been carried out on homelessness in neighbouring municipalities. This project was limited to the time constraints associated with a semester-long practicum placement. Certainly, a researcher with the ability to

undertake a longer research project, such as a Masters or Doctoral candidate, would be able to shed new light on this issue.

Finally, this researcher would have liked to have interviewed more laypersons to better understand the community's perception of homelessness. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, this was not possible. Future research should be aimed at better understanding the extent to which community members see homelessness as a problem, and might also seek to determine what the community is willing to do about this issue.